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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

Edited by

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VICTORIAN CRITICISM OF POETRY:

THE MINORITY TRADITION

I.

MATTHEW ARNOLD'S critical pronouncements upon the romantic poets, whether or not they command assent, are usually considered surprisingly original and uncharacteristic of their period. Mr. Eliot in his *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, speaks of the famous judgment that 'the English poetry of the first quarter of this century, with plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough' as one that must have seemed 'startlingly independent' when it first appeared. The quotation comes from the essay on *The Function of Criticism* first published in Bagehot's *National Review* in 1863, and first printed in book form in *Essays in Criticism*, 1865. We are accustomed to think of the 'sixties as a time when the reputation of the Romantic poets had reached its height and when both in criticism and in poetic practice the Romantic tradition was dominant. My aim in this paper is to bring together some evidence, chiefly from the main Victorian literary periodicals, to show that there was a fair body of opinion which shared, and to some extent anticipated, Arnold's dissatisfaction with the poetic tradition coming down from the Romantics and with the general tendencies of contemporary poetry. This dissatisfaction will be seen to be of different kinds, and different degrees of seriousness and to arise from varying preconceptions and assumptions about poetry and life in general: it will therefore perhaps be worth while to attempt some discrimination and classification of these examples of anti-romantic opinion with a view to estimating their significance.

Previous work on the material provided by Victorian reviews of poetry has to a great extent been conducted from a point of view *within* the general tradition of nineteenth-century romanticism and accepting the Victorian reputations as established and unshakable. The one instance that occurs to me of the kind of approach I have in mind, a balanced revaluation made in the consciousness of some inadequacy in the whole Victorian romantic tradition, is Morris Greenhut's essay on the criticism of George Henry Lewes, in *Review of English Studies* for January 1948.[3] He calls it *George Henry Lewes and the Classical Tradition in English Criticism*, finding many anticipations of the ideas not only of Arnold but also of Mr. Eliot.

[3]XXIV, 126.

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If this is true of Lewes, I think it can also be shown that he was not alone.

I start, then, from the fairly widespread modern point of view that the poetry of the nineteenth-century had, besides its triumphs, its own particular failings and inadequacies, that these became more marked after the period of the 'great' Romantics, and that as the century went on the finer consciousness of the age tended less and less to find satisfactory expression in poetry. A restricted notion of the feelings proper to poetic expression, a suspicion of satire, wit, the play of mind, a confusion of seriousness with solemnity, a conception of poetic style which emphasized verbal melody and sonority at the expense of the vitality of the rhythms and tone of speech, a tendency to lean too heavily upon his Romantic predecessors,—all these made it difficult for the Victorian poet to bring effectively into his poetry the normal adult consciousness, if not directly, the concerns and interests, of the age. I say 'effectively'—there were of course a great many attempts, but it would probably be agreed that the Victorian poets attain their most characteristic successes where they turn away from their problems and difficulties to an ideal world of romantic beauty and glamour. The one obvious exception to all this is clearly Browning, who did at least break to a considerable extent with conventionally poetic style, though his example had little general effect upon the main stream of poetic development. He certainly brings into poetry the energetic and active side of his age, but to many to-day he seems too much at ease in his time—representative, no doubt, but hardly of its finer consciousness. This view has perhaps been most adequately stated by Santayana in his *Poetry and Religion*, but it had been anticipated by Arnold's severer judgment: 'Browning is a man with a moderate gift, passionately desiring movement and fulness, and obtaining but a confused multitudinousness'.

II.

Coming back to Arnold, then, many of us to-day think him justified in feeling that there was something wrong with the general tendency of poetry in his time, and we are disposed to take seriously his suggestion that the fault goes back, at least in part, to the previous generation and to the Romantics themselves. Before going on to consider possible anticipations of this view it may be as well to remind ourselves of the main points of Arnold's case. In its first form it appears in the preface to the poems published in 1853. It would generally be agreed, I think, that the sense of something wrong, and the attempted diagnosis, of this preface are more interesting than the rather dubious prescription. The two most important later pronouncements are mainly diagnostic. The first, from *The Function of Criticism*, I have already mentioned: it is the suggestion that the powers of the great Romantic poets were partially wasted because they lacked a sufficiently lively intellectual background, a current of fresh thought, intelligent and alive, like that which

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animated the creative power in the age of Sophocles in Greece or the age of Shakespeare in England. 'This' he says 'makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth even, profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety'. The other key passage which occurs in the Essay on Heine, shifts the emphasis slightly, though it is still concerned with the play of ideas and the intellectual substance of poetry. In the English literary movement of the beginning of the century, he says, there was no successful application of modern ideas and the modern spirit. Byron and Shelley attempted it, but failed: the best literary creation of that time in England proceeded from men who did not make the same bold attempt as Byron and Shelley.

> 'What in fact was the career of the chief English men of letters, their contemporaries? The greatest of them, Wordsworth, retired (in Middle-Age phrase) into a monastery. I mean, he plunged himself in the inward life, he voluntarily cut himself off from the modern spirit. Coleridge took to opium. Scott became the historiographer-royal of feudalism. Keats passionately gave himself up to a sensuous genius, to his faculty for interpreting nature; and he died of consumption at twenty-five. Wordsworth, Scott and Keats have left admirable works; far more solid and complete works than those which Byron and Shelley have left. But their works have this defect, they do not belong to that which is the main current of the literature of modern epochs, they do not apply modern ideas to life; they constitute, therefore, *minor currents*, and all other literary work of our day, however popular, which has the same defect, also constitutes but a minor current.'

Lack of intellectual substance is here linked with the poet's failure to show, in his poetry, that he is completely alive in his own time. These passages will be found, I think, to cover the main reasons Arnold gives for dissatisfaction with the poetry of his own century. Later essays on individual poets vary the relative positions slightly, but the general attitude is perhaps sufficiently clear: one can see why Arnold should have had no very high opinion of Tennyson.

III.

In an earlier article in this journal,[4] dealing with the attitude of the Reviews to the literature of the period up to about 1830, I tried to show that while it derived from an eighteenth-century concern for Good Sense and the social virtues, it was not merely an obstinate repetition of neo-clasic shibboleths. The *Quarterly* and Blackwood's show a gradual acceptance of Wordsworth and even something of the critical influence of Coleridge, but there remains, in the 'twenties, a certain uneasiness about contemporary poetic tendencies. Even the *London Magazine*, founded in 1820 with the express aim of

[4] June, 1937: Vol. VI, p. 2.

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interpreting the spirit of the age, and usually a champion of the younger writer, is not altogether satisfied with the way things are going:[5] Hunt shows us a 'smallness of soul': Shelley is 'a visionary with a weak head and a rich imagination': Byron is 'forever playing tricks with himself and the public'. The age tends to be effeminate, with 'a propension to the soft and the beautiful in preference to the strenuous and the sublime', and there is a tendency to undervalue thought in poetry. The review (of Darley)[6] which makes this last complaint has an interesting discussion of rhythm, asserting that the modern cultivation of the 'merely auricular melody' of lyric verse leads to the neglect of that power of numbers which 'modulates the mind in which they are repeated'.

After 1830 a similar uneasiness continues. I find that the most frequent charge brought by early Victorian reviewers against the poetry of their time is a lack of thought. Under this heading may be grouped a series of complaints which range from objections to the poetic style and method of the prevailing tradition as failing to maintain a balance between the sensuous and emotional effects of language and its logical meaning, to the more general objection that contemporary poets were lacking in intellectual strength and profundity. At the beginning of the 'thirties the *Edinburgh* was noting some of the dangers of the current emphasis on feeling: the reviewer of Wright's translation of Dante (April, 1833)[7] remarks that modern readers of poetry seem to be either mystics or time-killers and that neither class is much concerned with sense. In the next volume (October, 1833)[8] the reviewer of *A Rhymed Plea for Tolerance* describes the essence of the poet's art as the bringing to bear on one point of many impressions and asserts that these may be either emotional or intellectual:

> '. . . as there is nothing poetical in the exercise of the reasoning powers alone, so neither is the exercise of those powers inconsistent with poetry. If, for instance, a writer can infuse pathos or brilliancy into his arguments, his arguments may be no less poetical than his descriptions; and if they be just and true, their truth and justice will not diminish, but will add greatly to the fervour or power with which their strictly poetical qualities are conceived or expressed.'

The poetry of the last thirty years, says the reviewer of Henry Taylor's drama, *Philip van Artevelde*, in October 1834,[9] 'resembled a luscious delicacy rather than a food:

> 'Its attractions were certainly numerous. It had exuberant and brilliant imagery, striking appeals to sensibility and passion, energy, sweetness, all that was felicitous in language, and all that was melodious in versification. But these attractive qualities

[5]On *Blackwood's Magazine*, Nov., 1820: II, 509.
[6]Dec., 1824: X, 571.
[7]LVII, 412. [8]LVIII, 307. [9]LX, 1.

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were unsubstantial and evanescent: partly because they were too exclusively addressed to the excitabilities (if we may so speak) of our nature: partly because they were not sufficiently founded on truth.

Byron, for example, 'has added little or nothing to our knowledge of the human heart. What he has introduced is a more extensive and familiar use of the vocabulary of passion' providing formulas which make it easy 'for inferior writers to convey in words what they cannot feel'. The reviewer goes on to praise Taylor for appealing to the understanding and not merely to the emotions. The influence of Shelley seemed to the *Edinburgh* even more dangerous than that of Byron. One finds several references to his predilection for the mystical and the vaporous. The article on Alford's poems, in January 1836,[10] comments:

'Early youth appears to take a peculiar pleasure in seeing language float along like an exhalation: nor is it at that age less liked because in this condition it is a better medium for communicating colours than ideas. This defect has been encouraged by the schoolboy popularity of Shelley: whose language is often too yielding and aerial, of too delicate and gossamer-like a texture to be the vehicle of so earthly a thing as substantial thought. Doubtless Shelley always had his meaning; but it was not always as strong and definite a meaning as critics, intrusted with the rights of others, are bound to insist on having.

Alford seems to the reviewer to show more intellectual strength than the best known of the young Cambridge poets, Mr. Tennyson, but 'there is room', he declares, 'for them all to mend'.

Similar preoccupations appear in the *Quarterly*. Henry Taylor himself, writing on Wordsworth in November 1834,[11] thinks that a new kind of 'poetic diction' is springing up, more insidious than that of the eighteenth century:

'If we look through some volume of current poetry for one of those words which seem to be considered eminently poetical at the present day—the adjective 'wild' for example—and consider it closely in the many situations in which it will be found to recur, we shall in general find it to be used, not for the sake of any meaning, definite or indefinite, which it can be supposed legitimately to bear, but—in a manner which Mr. Wordsworth's prefaces will be found to explain—for the sake of conjuring up certain associations somewhat casually connected with it. It has been originally, perhaps, employed with propriety, and with distinguished success, in some passages conceived in the same mood of mind, and pointed to the same effects which are aimed at by its subsequent employers; the word takes, as it were, the colour of these original passages; becomes a stock-word with those who have more of the feeling of poetry than of dis-

[10]LXII, 297. [11]LII, 317.

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crimination in the use of language, and is employed thenceforward with a progressively diminishing concern for its intrinsic significance, or for the propriety of the applications which are made of it. The adjectives *bright, dark, lonely,* the nouns *light, dream, halo,* and fifty other words, might be instanced, which are scattered almost at random through our fugitive poetry, with a sort of feeling senselessness, and convey to the congenial reader the sentiment of which they are understood to be the symbols, without either suggesting to him any meaning, or awakening him to the want of it.'

The *Quarterly's* continued insistence on the primacy of thought led to something of a campaign against contemporary poetic tendencies in the late 'sixties and the 'seventies. An article on *Modern English Poets* (1869)[12] finds a want of thought in the work of Arnold himself. A discussion of *The State of English Poetry* in 1873[13] objects to the growing notion that the true poetic use of language is an imitation of painting or of music—noting 'a tendency to treat language, which ought to be the living vehicle of thought, as the mere inanimate matter of style':

'Look where we may find little besides word-painting, alliteration, the revival of old forms, the construction of new metres, and it seems to be generally believed that any thought, however mean, can be transmuted into poetry in the crucible of style'.

These affirmations are repeated in an article on *Wordsworth and Gray* in 1876,[14] where the attempt to emulate painting and music is called a degradation of the poet's art. By this time, of course, the influence of Arnold's ideas may be seen, but there was a strain in *Quarterly* criticism to which they were obviously congenial.

The demand for thought in poetry appears equally in the *Westminster,* a notable example being Mill's comparatively favourable notice of Tennyson in 1835 (actually in the *London Review* which amalgamated with the *Westminster* after four numbers)[15] with the same insistence on the dangerous influence of Shelley:

'Where the poetic temperament exists in its greatest degree, while the systematic culture of the intellect has been neglected, we may expect to find, what we do find in the best poems of Shelley—vivid representations of states of passive and dreamy emotion, fitted to give extreme pleasure to persons of similar organisation to the poet, but not likely to be sympathised in, because not undersood, by any other persons: and scarcely conducing at all to the noblest end of poetry as an intellectual pursuit, that of acting upon the desires and characters of mankind through their emotions to raise them towards the perfection of their nature. This, like every other adaptation of means to ends, is the work of cultivated reason; and the poet's success in it will

[12]CXXVI, 328. [13]CXXXV, 1. [14]CXLI, 104.
[15]I, 402.

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> be in proportion to the intrinsic value of his thoughts, and to the command which he has acquired over the materials of his imagination for placing those thoughts in a strong light before the intellect and impressing them on the feelings.'

An article on the philosophical tendencies of Wordsworth, Shelley and Coleridge in 1836[16] notes Wordsworth's frequent lack of an adequate subject and the absence of progression in Shelley's thought, 'reminding us of those pyrotechnic exhibitions where fresh fire is perpetually rushing from a hundred jets, but the same flaming and solitary word stands unchanged before us'. Similar criticisms of Shelley appear in a not unfavourable article in 1858:[17] his poetry, says the reviewer, is the expression of the imagination unmodified by experience: he never anchored his imagination to anything, 'hence his weak, shadowy drawings, his want of substance, an absence of reality'.

Blackwood's Magazine, like the heavier reviews, was complaining in 1830 that 'in the poetry of our own age we miss the principle of intellectual strength'.[19] In 1839 the writer of *A Prosing upon Poetry*[20] insisted on the close connection between poetry and 'intellectual industry, and with moral as well as mental advancement'. 'Modern poets', says the review of Bailey's *Festus* in 1850[21] 'grow to have a horror of distinctness of thought. They shrink from examining their own ideas, lest these should turn out to be no ideas at all, or perhaps very good and sensible ideas but shockingly true and commonplace'. And an article on *American Poetry* in 1851[22] says of Lowell:

> 'He revels with Keats in that poetic imagery and language which has a tendency to separate itself too widely from the substratum of an intelligible meaning which ought always to be kept at least *in sight*.'

Fraser's Magazine yields the same kind of complaint, most notably in an article of 1853[23] on *Alexander Smith and Alexander Pope*, which speaks of 'the style in which almost everyone has been trying to write [poetry] since Pope and plain sense went out and Shelley and the seventh heaven came in':

> 'The real cause of this modern vagueness is rather to be found in shallow and unsound culture, and in that inability, or carelessness, about seeing any object clearly, which besets our poets just now. . . .'

Even the new weeklies, which tended to be on the whole more favourable to the younger poets, show the same emphasis on the intellect. The *Athenaeum* in 1834[24] praises Taylor's serious con-

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[16]XXV, 1. [17]N.S. XII, 97. [19]XXVII, 833.
[20]XLVI, 194. [21]LXVII, 415. [22]LXIX, 513.
[23]XLVII, 452. [24]1834, p. 484.

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ception of poetry and his insistence on sense: in the following year we find it warning the Browning of *Paracelsus* against the influence of Shelley's mysticism.[25] The *Spectator*, which rather backed Alexander Smith for a time, nevertheless warns him against too much imitation of Keats, Shelley and Tennyson: 'let him think more, learn more facts, care more about what objects are in themselves and less about the amount of pleasure they are capable of giving him, and we venture to hope that he may be among England's great names'. A later review of Bailey's *The Mystic* in 1855[26] adjures the Spasmodics in general:

> '. . . let them remember that thoughts are the representatives of things, and that sentences which yield to no analysis the smallest residuum of meaning will not constitute human speech, much less poems, which are the consummate flower of human speech.'

As some of these examples will have shown, complaints of feebleness of thought shade off easily into complaints of lack of moral strength and of the elements of greatness. The *Edinburgh* reviewer of Henry Taylor's 1849[27] volume approaches Arnold's 1853 preface when he says:

> 'It is a mistake to cram poetry with many thoughts; for it is not their multitude but their gravity that makes poetry truly intellectual. It is a still greater mistake to wander in search of originality.'

The *Quarterly* article on Wordsworth and Gray in 1876, already mentioned, sees obvious moral deficiencies in modern poetry:

> 'Let those who complain of our criticism reflect on the old characteristics of our poetry, its manly vigour, its healthy tone, and the simple dignity of its language. Let them compare with these qualities the softness and sentimentality of modern verse, its distorted representations of nature and unsocial views of life, its inclinations to scepticism and sensuality, the luxurious effeminacy of its thought, the foppish singularity of its diction, and then say what effect this kind of art . . . is likely to produce on the health of those who are constantly indulging in it.'

Blackwood's, in an article of 1856 on *Modern Light Literature—Poetry*[28] censures the morbid heroes of Tennyson (in *Maud*) and the Spasmodics, and sees poetry becoming a mere accomplishment. *Fraser's* contemplating *The Past and Present Condition of English Poetry* in 1846,[29] sees a general mediocrity of level, and the reviewer of Arnold's *Strayed Reveller* in 1849[30] censures its inadequate morality ('not more helpful than Tennyson's Lotus Eaters').

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[25] 1835, p. 640. [26] 1855, 1163. [27] LXXXIX, 352.
[28] LXXIX, 127. [29] XXXIII, 713. [30] XXXIX, 571.

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IV.

Some of these comments are already approaching the second main count against Victorian poetry by reviewers—that it is out of touch with contemporary life. The complaint takes a number of forms: at its most judicious it approaches Arnold's demand for the application of modern ideas and the modern spirit: at its crudest it demands the kind of superficial 'setting the age to poetry' which Arnold rejected in the 1853 preface. At one end of the scale were those who thought that poetry could and should express the modern consciousness but was failing to do so adequately; at the other those who thought that the contemporary world and its interests were intractable material, essentially unpoetical:—and of these, again, some regretted the situation, while the more Utilitarian thought that poetry being of little real importance anyway it was quite reasonably employed in providing a holiday dream world.

The *Edinburgh's* review of Henry Taylor in 1834, mentioned earlier, has some general warnings about the seductions of Romantic poetry as an escape from life.

> '. . . It is true that the temporary pleasure derived from poetry of this kind is great—that it transports us into another sphere, and we feel a glad sense of emancipation in quitting for a while, in fancy, the dull realities of common life. But this mental intoxication, though it gratifies for a time, can no more increase our permanent stock of pleasurable resources, than can the degrading vice to which it is in some sort analogous.'

The fullest statement of the issue is probably that by the *Edinburgh* reviewer of Southey's Poetical Works in 1839:[31]

> 'What are the subjects of thought on which the minds of most men now love to expend that surplus energy which is not absorbed by the ordinary duties and exigencies of their station?—the favourite stuff of our day-dreams? The dominion attained by man over the elements; the wonderful changes in commerce and communications; and all the relations of life depending on them, which are beginning to open upon society. These are topics which warm and exalt the spirits, and render them peculiarly susceptible to rhetorical exaggeration; but they are scarcely poetical . . . . The star of the engineer, we suspect, must be on the decline, before that of the poet can culminate again.'

The reviewer is not really as pessimistic as this, however, and looks forward to the day when 'spirits will arise which will so assimilate the mechanical temperament of the age to their own genius, that it shall furnish a new and rich fountain of poetry'. In the *Quarterly* we find John Sterling, in a review of Tennyson's 1842 volume[32] much concerned with the ferment of life and mechanical progress

[31] LXVIII, 354. [32] LXX, 385.

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in his age and the need for a new poetry to do justice to it. With reservations, he thinks that Tennyson has done more than any other poet to solve this problem of 'turning into fixed beauty . . . the shifting and mingled matter of our time'. In the later series of articles taking stock of modern poetic tendencies, to which I have already referred, escapism is a frequent charge. An important consideration of Swinburne, Morris and Rossetti in 1872 under the title *The Latest Development of Literary Poetry* (sometimes ascribed to W. J. Courthope and sometimes to Abraham Hayward)[33] asserts that Keats turned away from real life and that Victorian poets have followed him, so that poetry is becoming 'a kind of intellectual opium-eating . . . when Mr. Tennyson wishes to give a reflection of society he reconnoitres it with a telescope, as in *The Princess* or lifts his theme upon the stilts of a classical style, as in *Aylmer's Field*'. Morris in particular is blamed for his withdrawal from the present—Chaucer, whom he imitates, would not, says the reviewer, have found the present 'an empty day'.

Blackwood's yields a number of similar discussions. The reviewer of Emerson in 1847[34] says that (it is not a great poem that mankind now want or look for: they rather demand a great work, or works, on human society, on the momentous problems which our social progress as well as our social difficulties, alike give rise to'. An essay in 1851 on *Some American Poets*[35] uses the significant comparison of poetry to a butterfly seen in a newly-dug railway cutting, and seems to approve its restriction to private and domestic life. The review of Alexander Smith's Poems in 1854[36] speaks of the 'difficulties of an unpoetical age', but warns him that a deliberate and conscious aim of setting the age to music 'is likely to produce mere equivalents of the "railway polka".'

Fraser's in the article mentioned on Arnold, demands in somewhat the manner of Carlyle to know what new light he has thrown 'on man or nature, the past awful ages or this most awful present one, when the world is heaving and moaning in the agonies either of a death-struggle, or a new birth-hour more glorious than that which the sixteenth century beheld'.

In 1853 some *Thoughts on Shelley and Byron*[37] suggest that something has been wrong with poetry for the last thirty years:

> 'When we see poetry dying down among us year by year, although the age is becoming year by year more marvellous and inspiring, we have a right to look for some false principle in a school which has had so little enduring vitality . . . .'

In the *Athenaeum* an interesting argument was started in 1844 by a letter signed Beta[38] which complained that the modern school of poetry lacked fire and did not speak for society, and that the real energy of the time was going into such things as Lord Ashley's reforms.

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[33]CXXXII, 59. [34]LXII, 643. [35]LXIX, 513.
[36]LXXV, 345. [37]XLVIII, 569. [38]1844, p. 270.

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The Spectator, reviewing Arnold's Poems of 1853,[39] joined issue with the views of the preface, asserted the need for the poet to choose subjects from the life of his time—'an age of spiritual discomfort needs more than any other its interpreter' and invoked the advice given by Sandy Mackaye to the young Alton Locke in Kingsley's novel to make poetry out of the poverty and squalor of his own world. The review of Arnold's *Merope*[40] returned to the same point, and that of Swinburne's *Atlanta in Calydon* in 1865[41] made similar comments on the direct imitation of Greek models.

V.

Allied to the accusations of escapism are the frequent objections that modern poets are too subjective and egotistical, concerned with their own peculiar sensibilities, rather than the typical feelings of normal mankind, and too ready to take themselves as superior beings. The *Edinburgh's* comment on Elizabeth Barrett Browning is typical, in a general survey of her work in 1861[42]:

> 'The originality of the poet is shown in the creations he is able to make out of the solid stuff of human life. . . . Originality, doubtless, is much: but true originality will never be attained by a self-conscious, morbid, restless assertion of the value of a man's own individuality.'

The origin of this over-subjective tendency was usually traced to Wordsworth. The *Quarterly* writer on 'Literary Poetry' in 1872 noted from his time onwards an increasing tendency for the poets to separate themselves into a clique with a morbid sensitiveness to criticism, adding:

> 'We believe that the faith in modern poets as superior beings is based upon the extraordinary difference between their language and that in general use.'

A favourite example, quoted ironically by various reviewers, was Tennyson's early lines

> Vex not thou the poet's mind
> With thy shallow wit. . . .

In 1856, the *Blackwood's article on Modern Light Literature—Poetry* was repeating the charges against Wordsworth:

> '. . . it is to him we owe it, that the poet in these days is to be regarded as a delicate monster, a creature who lives not life but poetry, a being withdrawn out of the common existence, and

[39]1853, Dec. 3rd, Supplement, p. 5.
[40]1858, p. 25. [41]1865, p. 214. [42]CXIV, 513.

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seeing its events only in the magic mirror of his own consciousness, as the Lady of Shalott saw the boats upon the river . . . It is in this way that the manner which is natural and a necessity to some one great spirit becomes an intolerable bondage and oppression to a crowd of smaller ones.'

We find Fraser's reviewer of recent poetry in 1894[44] complaining that there are so few good new ballads nowadays because the secret of the ballad is objectivity and the absence of subjective sentiment. Modern subjective poetry, says the writer on *Alexander Smith and Alexander Pope,* is really a form of egotism, and the article on Shelley and Byron in 1853 blames them both for the 'ugly superstition' that genius has a right to be eccentric—'all great poets before the Romantics were free from this sort of thing'. Similar complaints appear in the *Athenaeum's* discussion of modern poetry in 1844 and in some of the *Saturday Review's* criticisms of the Spasmodics—in 1857,[46] for example, Alexander Smith is recommended 'to study the lives and sorrows of other people' rather than his own.

VI.

From complaints of excessive subjectivity it is an easy step to charges of affectation, extravagance and general lack of discipline. The *Edinburgh* sums up its article on *New Poets,* in 1856,[47] dealing with several of the Spasmodics, Arnold and Meredith:

> 'The prevailing taste of the latest school of poetry in England is neither a healthy nor a vigorous one. It is infected with something of that mannerism which has produced the Pre-Raphaelite school of painters. In the absence of the higher qualities of art, such as enlarged creative powers of fiction, the charm of narrative, and the broad light and shade of character and thought, these poets linger with tedious predilection over the mosses on a wall, or chace the shadows of the plain. There is not enough of human interest in their hearts.

The *Edinburgh* found Elizabeth Barrett Browning especially open to the charge of indiscipline. The review of 1861 says:

> 'She had neither simplicity, taste or good sense. Her style was always inflated; and her fame would be ten times as great and as deserved as it is if she had left us a single lucid and finished performance instead of a crowd of incoherent thoughts and extravagant images.'

The *Edinburgh's* charge against Browning himself in 1864[48] was of persistent affectation and obscurity with a passion for the grotesque and for doggerel which hampered his unusual powers of mind.

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[44]XXXIX, 571. [46]IV, 351. [47]CIV, 337.
[48]CXX, 537.

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In this group we find a number of reviews of a hearty no-nonsense type which carry on some of the more obvious prejudices of earlier critics. Lockhart in the *Quarterly* in 1839[49] is sure that Monckton Milnes must regret his early worship of 'such baby idols as Mr. John Keats and Mr. Alfred Tennyson' and will not think it worth while to go on spinning 'puny sentimentalities into lyrical namby-pamby'. *Blackwood's*, faced in 1844[50] by Coventry Patmore's first volume, lets itself go over 'the nauseous pulings of Mr. Patmore's muse'. On Tennyson's Poems of 1849[51] it blamed the bad school of taste in which the poet began writing for the mixture of affectation in his work. It was a time, says the reviewer, when a poet could get away with anything:

> 'Was it any wonder that at such an epoch we should have had Keats writing his *Endymion* or Tennyson elaborating his incomprehensible *Ode to Memory*, or inditing his foolish songs *To the Owl*, or torturing himself to unite old balladry with modern sentiment in his *Lady of Shalott*, for ever rhyming with that detested town of Camelot: or that he should have been stringing together fulsome self-adulatory nonsense about the poet and the poet's mind?'

Fraser's in 1846[52] was making the usual objections to affectation in Browning, and saying that 'our poetry is in a very sorry kind of plight if it has to depend upon Tennyson and Browning for the hereditary honours of its existence' though it admitted both as genuine poets.

Of the weeklies the *Spectator* objected to Tennyson's namby-pamby, singularity and 'cockney and piebald language' in the poems of 1842,[54] and in 1851[55] it repeated the usual charges against Mrs. Browning, 'who never knows when she has said enough'. Similar charges were repeated by the *Saturday Review* in 1856.[56]

Often the charge against the Victorian poets is specifically that of formlessness. A writer in the *Edinburgh* on Glassford's *Lyrical Translations* in 1835[57] speaks of the excesses of the Romantics and hopes for more *design* in future poetry, and that it may 'trust not to the effect of insulated and fragmentary scenes and passages worked up with elaborate and startling effect, but to the due relation and subordination of all parts to one clear general design'. The article mentioned earlier on *New Poets* (1856) censures the Spasmodics especially for their cult of striking lines and passages, quoting Arnold's 1853 preface against this practice, with its 'kind of Christmas tree effect' but considers that Arnold himself fails to illustrate his own doctrines. In the later *Quarterly* articles formlessness and lack of unity become major counts against the Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetic movement.

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[49]LXIV, 59. [50]LVI, 331. [51]LXV, 453.
[52]XXXIII 713. [54]XV, 544. [55]1851, p. 85.
[56]II, 776. [57]LX, 353.

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VII.

The final charge deserving notice is that Victorian poetry is derivative and literary in its inspiration. The *Edinburgh* reviewer of Southey in 1839 described much contemporary work as of this type:

> 'There is a species of poetry which appears to belong exclusively to a period of advanced civilization, and of which, indeed, it is impossible to conceive the existence without it. It is that of which the character consists in the imitation of nature, not as she appears in actual converse with men, or observation of external things, but as she is reflected in books.'

The *Quarterly* article referred to earlier on *The Latest Development of Literary Poetry* takes this as its main theme—'since Keats, English poetry has had an exclusively literary mark'—and analyses Swinburne, Rossetti and Morris as examples of the tendency. *Blackwood's*, reviewing Arnold in 1849,[58] finds his besetting sin to be imitation, especially of Tennyson, and in 1854 repeats the charge particularly as regards the derivative nature of *Sohrab and Rustum*.[59] *Fraser's*, in an article on *Keats and his School* in 1848[60] notes the relation between Tennyson and Keats—'and in calling Keats the father of Tennyson, we make him out, of course, to be the ancestor of the whole progeny of poetical activities to which Tennyson has given, or is yet to give birth:'—but it is inclined to think Tennyson on the whole more satisfactory. In *The Prevailing Epidemic* (1851) it deals summarily with the lesser imitators of Tennyson.

VIII.

Perhaps sufficient evidence has been given by now that Arnold did not stand completely alone when he made his detached criticisms of Romantic poetry and the tendencies of his own age. What he did was to gather up and give more adequate expression to ideas and attitudes fairly widely shared by at least a substantial minority of critics and general readers. I am not claiming that the views in question were typical of periodical criticism as a whole at this time. They were fairly strong in the early 'thirties, but from then on to mid-Victorian times there is a gradual but steady movement towards the acceptance of what we now consider to be the typical Victorian literary values. I have not been concerned to trace the rise in the stock of Keats and Shelley through the 'forties, the gradual acceptance of Tennyson, who was pretty generally agreed to be a great poet and sage by the end of the 'fifties, the somewhat slower recognition of Arnold, the delayed acceptance of Browning and the early propaganda of enthusiasts such as H. Buxton Forman for the Pre-Raphaelites. One reason why I have given fewer extracts from the weeklies is that both the *Athenaeum* and the *Spectator*,

[58]LXVI, 340. [59]LXXV, 303. [60]XXXVIII, 459.

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but especially the former, tended on the whole to accept the general Romantic position, tempering it with a concern for practical progress and moral improvement.[63] What one can claim is that these anti-Romantic views form at least a strong current of opinion and that they are not all to be dismissed as reactionary survivals.

It may have been noticed that there are three main periods which provoke discussions of the kind I have been illustrating: the period of uncertainty and general poetic stock-taking of the 'thirties and early 'forties: the period of the Spasmodic poets in the 'fifties and the period of the early volumes of the Pre-Raphaelites in roughly the late 'sixties. Later come the discussions of the ideal of 'culture' and the aesthetic movement. Mlle. Rosenblatt, in *L'ideé de l'Art pour l'Art dans la littérature anglaise pendant la période victorienne,* interprets the poetic development of the period as a straightforward progress towards *Art for Art's Sake* under the pressure of utilitarianism and an immoderate demand for direct moral teaching. We are in a position, I think, to make some finer distinctions in estimating the significance of these anti-Romantic trends.

The chief point is that they exist at various levels of seriousness. The complaints that Victorian poetry lacks intellectual and moral strength are sometimes clearly related to evangelical solemnity and a penchant for the obviously useful and improving. We feel that something of the sort is involved when the reviewers put their money on Henry Taylor and Aubrey de Vere. But at other times they are clearly expressing a genuine sense of something lacking in the poetry of their own age in a manner which deserves to be taken seriously. Some of the charges of 'escapism', again, have a crudity which is utilitarian and even Philistine: if poetry cannot keep up with modern progress, so much the worse for poetry. *Fraser's Magazine* falls into this kind of thing at times. But after the early days of Benthamite propaganda it is not common in the *Westminster*. In fact the professed utilitarians and their radical and positivist successors were on the whole more ready to accept the poetry of romantic escape than others; partly because they did not, at bottom, take it so seriously, reserving the full force of their intelligence for science, philosophy and politics; partly because they were less concerned with cultural traditions than with practical reforms, and were ready to accept the latest development as the highest, and partly, perhaps, because Shelleyan romanticism went with radical politics. An article on Shelley by G. H. Lewes in 1841[64] considers the two most memorable men of the century so far to have been Shelley and Bentham. Later the *Fortnightly* under Morley was to support Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, Pater and Aestheticism generally. But the charge that poetry is largely cutting itself off from the life of its time is often a more penetrating criticism based on a real perception of the relation between art and life in earlier periods.

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[63]For an account of weekly reviewing in the 'fifties, see J. D. Jump's article in the *Review of English Studies,* Jan., 1948; XXIV, 42.
[64]XXXV, 303.

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It is the same with the charges of excessive subjectivity, formlessness, lack of discipline and too great dependence upon the immediately preceding poets. Sometimes the reviewers make these accusations in a spirit of comparatively insensitive reaction: there is something of this in the *Quarterly* of the 'thirties, and more in *Blackwood's* and the early *Fraser's*, but the majority cannot be so dismissed. It is not usually mere obscurantism which sets up the eighteenth century virtues against Victorian excess and emotionalism: the better reviewers conduct the discussion in terms of pertinent analysis and comparison, as when Pope's account of the death of Villiers is put beside Alexander Smith, or the language of the Atticus portrait is contrasted with the affectations of the Pre-Raphaelites. In this calling in of the eighteenth century to redress the balance some of the reviewers went further than Arnold. It may be significant that it was Whitwell Elwin, editor of the *Quarterly*, who started what was until recently the standard edition of Pope, and W. J. Courthope, a contributor, who completed it. The *Quarterly's* conservatism seems to have disposed its writers to a stronger sense of the continuity of tradition in literature and criticism.

The chief reason why these anti-Romantic criticisms seem to have had little effect, except with the Spasmodics, who were fairly easy game, was, I think, that there were almost no examples they could point to of contemporary poets possessing the qualities they felt to be needed. Their significance for the literary historian lies in the suggestion of a minority tradition running right through the period in which Romantic ideas and attitudes were dominant. It is an important part of Arnold's background; it appears in Courthope and I think in Leslie Stephen, and so runs down almost to our own day.

R. G. Cox.

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THE NOVEL AS DRAMATIC POEM (VI): 'WOMEN IN LOVE' (III)

SO substantially and wonderfully is *Women in Love* an achieved thing that the faults seem to me very minor. I have spoken of the worst, the element of jargon, which is the more irritating because it so often comes when the uncertainty it betrays is unnecessary: what Lawrence offers to reinforce by *saying* and insisting, though saying could in any case be of no avail, his art has sufficiently done. The other fault is of a kind that might look like strength, for in it are certainly manifested, in a striking way, the powers of a highly gifted novelist. It is represented pre-eminently by chapters VI and VII ('Crême de Menthe' and 'Token') and chapter XXVIII ('Gudrun in the Pompadour'). Lawrence here does some astonishingly vivid history: he recreates, giving us the identifiable individuals, the metropolitan Bohemia he had known after the success of *Sons and Lovers*. A great deal of what he renders with such force is clearly there because it was once actual; he recalls the scene, the detail and the face. The episode that made so deep an impression on him goes in, for that reason—even when it was one he only heard about, as for instance that of the impounding of the letter by Katherine Mansfield at the Café Royal. But all that doesn't owe its presence to the needs of thematic definition and development would have been better excluded; a point to be made with the more emphasis since *Women in Love* has so complex and subtle an organization, and we have to assume in general, as we read, that everything is fully significant.

How, we have now to inquire, was it possible to bring against Lawrence's art in *Women in Love* the kind of criticism brought with such violence by Middleton Murry when the novel came up for review?—

> 'we can discern no individuality whatever in the denizens of Mr. Lawrence's world. We should have thought that we should be able to distinguish between male and female, at least. But no! Remove the names, remove the sedulous catalogue of unnecessary clothing . . . and man and woman are as indistinguishable as octopods in an aquarium tank'.[1]

If what we have here were merely an astonishing capacity for aberration in a given critic there would be no point in asking how such a pronouncement should have been possible. But Murry's reaction has in fact a representative quality. It expresses in an extreme form a kind of dislike that one met with among the

[1] J. Middleton Murry: *Reminiscences of D. H. Lawrence*, p. 223.

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sophisticated in the 1930s when advancing the claims of Lawrence ('I've no use for a novelist who can't create characters you can get hold of'). Where *Women in Love* has been in question I am not sure that Murry's verdict wouldn't at any time up till now have been very generally endorsed. No one, of course, could say of the great body of short stories and *nouvelles* that they were remarkable for any lack of gift or bent they showed for the evoking of distinguishable *dramatis personae*. And—though how account for the almost complete neglect suffered by such a masterpiece as *St. Mawr*?—that an original creative genius appears convincingly in some of them has been very widely recognized. Yet the power of making human individuality livingly present which is in fact one of the striking manifestations of that genius in the tales is not less undeniably there in *Women in Love*. By 'undeniably' I mean that one could, without research, produce abundant and varied illustration of the thing's being done, in ways that the ordinary novel-reader might have been expected to find irresistible—if, that is, *Women in Love* hadn't offered so much more than the dramatic play of 'character'.

Here, of course, in this last clause, we have the answer to the question why so patently false a judgment as that of Murry's quoted above should have been possible. These recognizable manifestations of the 'art of the novelist' are, like everything else in *Women in Love* (with the minor qualifications suggested), wholly significant, and significant in relation to a drama of a different order from that of *Madame Bovary* or of *Adam Bede*—or of *Sons and Lovers*. The habit-conditioned novel-reader brings to the book expectations that certainly do not open him to the possibility of that kind of significance; he merely feels that such local life as he may acclaim is unexplained, or wantonly stultified, by the offered context; he is left with a general impression of meaningless chaos. Murry, intent on the significance, and responding with exasperation to a challenge he doesn't understand, but is sure he hates, declares the whole book altogether devoid of any life that is distinguishably human: 'We can discern no individuality whatever in the denizens of Mr. Lawrence's world'.

Yet consider Hermione Roddice. I pick on her because she so indisputably has all the qualifications for being recognized as triumphantly a character even by the novel-reader who is repelled by the hint of Laurentian significances. With her introduction at the wedding, in the first chapter, she becomes for us a potent specific presence. We see her first through Ursula Brangwen's eyes:

> 'a tall slow, reluctant woman with a weight of fair hair, and a pale, long face. This was Hermione Roddice, a friend of the Criches. Now she came along with her head held up, balancing an enormous flat hat of pale yellow velvet, on which were streaks of ostrich feathers, natural and grey. She drifted forward as if scarcely conscious, her long blanched face lifted up, not to see the world. . . . People were silent when she passed, impressed,

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aroused, wanting to jeer, yet for some reason silenced. Her long, pale face, that she carried lifted up, somewhat in the Rossetti fashion, seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within, and she was never allowed to escape'.

Her physical presence and her manner are as vividly evoked as those of any character in fiction, and they transmit to us the resonance of her inner personality. The highly and convincingly individual Hermione, who is 'there' beyond question even for the reader who doesn't take kindly to the hint of significances that are not to be expressed in the climaxes and resolutions of the drama of 'characters', is nevertheless wholly significant in terms of the deep informing themes of the book.

' "I was a very queer and nervous girl. And by learning to use my will, simply by using my will, I *made* myself right".

Ursula looked all the while at Hermione, as she spoke in her slow, dispassionate, and yet strangely tense voice. A curious thrill went over the younger woman. Some strange, dark, convulsive power was in Hermione, fascinating and repelling.

"It is fatal to use the will like that", cried Birkin harshly, "disgusting. Such a will is an obscenity".

Hermione looked at him for a long time, with her shadowed, heavy eyes. Her face was soft and pale and thin, almost phosphorescent, her jaw was lean.

"I'm sure it isn't", she said at length. There always seemed an interval, a strange split between what she seemed to feel and experience, and what she actually said and thought. She seemed to catch her thoughts at length from off the surface of a maelstrom of chaotic black emotions and reactions. Birkin was always filled with repulsion, she caught so infallibly, her will never failed her. Her voice was always dispassionate and tense, and perfectly confident. Yet she shuddered with a sense of nausea, a sort of sea-sickness that always threatened to overwhelm her mind. But her mind remained unbroken, her will was still perfect. It almost sent Birkin mad. But he would never, never dare to break her will, and let loose the maelstrom of her unconsciousness, and see her in her ultimate madness. Yet he was always striking at her'.

The penultimate sentence is not an instance of a Laurentian lapse into jargon. It has behind it the blow that Birkin has suffered from Hermione's paper-weight. That episode represents the radical disconcertingness with which *Women in Love* has defeated so many readers and left them ready to endorse some such judgment as Murry's; it gives us the preoccupation with significances that are not to be conveyed by crises and resolutions of the familiar kind, at the level of the drama of 'characters'. And yet, as a matter of fact, the blow dealt by Hermione issues with a sufficiently clear inevitability (one would have thought) out of a preceding exoteric

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drama in which the powers of a great novelist manifest themselves in ways that offer nothing to baffle, and everything to engage, and convince, the reader who comes to Lawrence from George Eliot and Tolstoy. Since the instance has a very convenient representative value I will examine at some length the circumstances of the blow.

The chapter (VIII, called by the name of the Roddice country-house, 'Breadalby') opens with Hermione's reception of the two Brangwen sisters, which makes us feel at the outset the peculiar oppressive insistence with which her presence pervades the house-party. We recognize this reception as wholly significant—Hermione's personality in action: this is what, as hostess, she inevitably is:

> 'The motor-car ran down the hill and up again in one breath, and they were curving to the side door. A parlour-maid appeared, and then Hermione, coming forward with her pale face lifted, and her hands outstretched, advancing straight to the newcomers, her voice singing:
>
> "Here you are—I'm so glad to see you—" she kissed Gudrun—"so glad to see you"—she kissed Ursula and remained with her arm round her.
>
> "Are you very tired?"
>
> "Not at all tired," said Ursula.
>
> "Are you tired, Gudrun?"
>
> "Not at all, thanks", said Gudrun.
>
> "No—" drawled Hermione. And she stood and looked at them. The two girls were embarrassed because she would not move into the house, but must have her little scene of welcome there on the path. The servants waited.
>
> "Come in", said Hermione at last, having fully taken in the pair of them.
>
> Ursula was glad when she could be left alone in her room. Hermione lingered so long, made such a stress on one. She stood so near to one, pressing herself near upon one, in a way that was most embarrassing and oppressive. She seemed to hinder one's workings.'

It is the idealistic intellectuality going with the insistent will that we are next reminded of. As the party sit on the lawn after lunch, 'round the bushes comes the tall form of Alexander Roddice, striding romantically like a Meredith hero who remembers Disraeli'. Since he has just come from London, from the House, and has the resignation of the Minister of Education to report, the talk (the very recognizable advanced thinker Sir Joshua Mattheson being present) naturally turns on education. Hermione rhapsodizes characteristically, provoking from Birkin a retort the personal animus of which brings in as a disturbingly immediate presence the tense history of their personal relations:

> ' "M-m-m— I don't know. . . . But one thing was the stars, when I really understood something about the stars. One feels so *uplifted*, so *unbounded*."

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Birkin looked at her in a white fury.

"What do you want to feel unbounded for?" he said sarcastically. "You don't want to *be* unbounded."

Hermione recoiled in offence.

"Yes, but one does have that limitless feeling", said Gerald. "It's like getting on top of the mountain and seeing the Pacific."

"Silent upon a peak in Dariayn", murmured the Italian, lifting her face for a moment from her book.

"Not necessarily in Darien", said Gerald, while Ursula began to laugh.

Hermione waited for the dust to settle, and then she said, untouched:

"Yes, it's the greatest thing in life—to *know*. It is really to be happy, to be *free*".

"Knowledge is, of course, liberty", said Mattheson'.

Hermione, we know, is *not* happy and *not* free; to what extent not, the culmination of this chapter will bring out. Her love of 'knowledge' is the desperate sense of insufficiency that determines also her attachment to Birkin—makes him, that is, so terribly necessary to her; and the sense of insufficiency is indistinguishable from the unrelaxed insistence of her will. The will asserts itself now, after the affront, in what is on the surface an episode of comedy:

'After tea, they were all gathered for a walk.

"Would you like to come for a walk?" said Hermione to each of them, one by one. And they all said yes, feeling somehow like prisoners marshalled for exercise. Birkin only refused.

"Will you come for a walk, Rupert?"

"No, Hermione".

"But are you *sure*?"

"Quite sure". There was a second's hesitation.

"And why not?" sang Hermione's question. It made her blood run sharp, to be thwarted in even so trifling a matter. She intended them all to walk with her in the park'.

"Because I don't like trooping off in a gang", he said.

Her voice rumbled in her throat for a moment. Then she said, with a curious strong calm:

"Then we'll leave a little boy behind, if he's sulky."

And she looked really gay, while she insulted him'.

This leaves things at a new pitch of tension between them. Hermione's behaviour as she conducts the walk is given us with all the economy of Lawrence's most vivid art. We see her as a figure of comedy, the domineering female. But, at the same time, if we have really been reading the book, we see her as enacting the case that, by a variety of creative means, has been diagnosed for us and presented with such potency:

'They all went through the park. Hermione wanted to show them the wild daffodils on a little slope. "This way, this way",

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sang her voice at intervals. And they had all to come this way. The daffodils were pretty, but who could see them? Ursula was stiff all over with resentment by this time, resentment of the whole atmosphere. Gudrun, mocking and objective, watched and registered everything.

They looked at the shy deer, and Hermione talked to the stag as if he too were a boy she wanted to wheedle and fondle. He was male, so she must exert some kind of power over him. They trailed home by the fish-ponds, and Hermione told them about the quarrel of two male swans, who had striven for the love of one lady. She chuckled and laughed as she told them how the ousted lover had sat with his head buried under his wing, on the gravel'.

It is not to comedy that this, in its full significance, belongs; we feel too disturbingly beneath the comedy surface, in the feminine will and the malice, the thwarted life and the torments of the starved psyche. That Gudrun, 'mocking and objective, watched and registered everything' we register against *her* as characteristic (for, in spite of Murry, the sisters are strongly differentiated, and Gudrun, in being evoked as a highly specific personality, is critically 'placed').

The insistent will makes itself felt more menacingly as a blind and sinister force in the obsessed intensity with which Hermione, returned from the walk, seeks Birkin out:

' "Where is Mr. Birkin, Alice?" asked the mild, straying voice of Hermione. But under the straying voice, what a persistent, almost insane *will*'.

"I think he is in his room, madam".

"Is he?"

Hermione went slowly up the stairs, along the corridor, singing out in her high, small call:

"Ru-oo-pert! Ru-oo-pert!"

She came to his door, and tapped, still crying: "Roo-pert".

"Yes", sounded his voice at last.

"What are you doing?"

The question was mild and curious.

There was no answer. Then he opened the door.

"We've come back", said Hermione. "The daffodils are *so* beautiful".

"Yes", he said. "I've seen them".

She looked at him with her long, slow impressive look, along her cheeks.

"Have you?" she echoed. And she remained looking at him. She was stimulated above all things by this conflict with him, when he was like a sulky boy, helpless, and she had him safe at Breadalby. But underneath she knew the split was coming, and her hatred of him was subconscious and intense'.

It is not a mere matter of our being *told* that 'her hatred of him was subconscious and intense'; the destructive animus has been defined and conveyed by a variety of inexplicit evocative means.

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It is there in the hunger of possession with which she besieges him:

> ' "What were you doing?" she reiterated, in her mild, indifferent tone. He did not answer, and she made her way, almost unconsciously into his room. He had taken a Chinese drawing of geese from the boudoir, and was copying it, with much skill and vividness.
>
> "You are copying the drawing", she said, standing near the table, and looking down at his work . . .
>
> "But why do you copy it?" she asked, casual and sing-song. "Why not do something original?"
>
> "I want to know it", he replied. "One gets more of China, copying this picture, than reading all the books".
>
> "And what do you get?"
>
> She was at once roused, she laid as it were violent hands on him, to extract his secrets from him. She *must* know. It was a dreadful tyranny, an obsession in her, to know all he knew. For some time he was silent, hating to answer her. Then, compelled, he began:
>
> "I know what centres they live from—what they perceive and feel—the hot, stinging centrality of a goose in the flux of cold water and mud—the curious bitter stinging heat of a goose's blood, entering their own blood like an inoculation of corruptive fire—fire of the cold-burning mud—the lotus mystery." '

She *must* know; her will is not her instrument, a power by which she commands: she is under its compulsion, the slave of a malign automatism that is inimical to life in herself as in Birkin. To 'know' is to possess, and to possess is to destroy; it is a self-defeating process. This, far down in herself, Birkin's reply forces her to realize; his 'knowing' is so obviously a different kind of thing, and different in a way that proclaims, implicitly, the impossibility of satisfying her own hunger to 'know': hence the strange quality of her reaction.

It is here, it might be said, that the drama becomes decidedly esoteric; no longer, that is, immediately intelligible and convincing to the novel-reader who approaches in good faith, but with no special apparatus of interpretation. And yet, actually, what we have here demands of the reader, for its effect, no interpretive capacity beyond the power of recognition and response that is generated in an intelligent reading of what has gone before. It is not for nothing that the very identifiable Sir Joshua Mattheson figures in the house-party (he alone, 'whose mental fibre was so tough as to be insentient, seemed to be thoroughly happy'). Birkin, we are counted on to recognize, is consciously resorting to a use of language directly opposed to that of which Sir Joshua is the distinguished representative—Sir Joshua, the 'famous sociologist', whose approach to human problems, we have reason for supposing, very closely resembles Bertrand Russell's. Birkin here, with the Chinese drawing in view, is forcing Hermione to admit to herself an awareness of 'unknown modes of being'. To understand him is to recognize her awareness of such modes in herself; unknown and unknowable, in

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the sense that they cannot be reduced to terms of the 'mental consciousness'.

This recognition is insufferable to her; it is a recognition that the reality of life is something she can have no command over, and cannot take into her possession. As for Birkin, not only is he brutally defying her need of him; he has made her, for the moment at least, unable not to realize that he couldn't in any case be the cure for her insufficiency that she so desperately wants him to be, since to possess him is in the nature of things impossible. Forced by the essential failure of life in herself to live by her will and her possessiveness (a process that confirms the failure), she now finds these annulled—for that is what, for the moment, her sense of their futility amounts to. There is nothing unintelligible about the rendering, here, of her state and its significance, even though the language is not Sir Joshua's, any more than the state represents any problem that could interest him:

> 'Hermione looked at him along her narrow, pallid cheeks. Her eyes were strange and drugged, heavy under their heavy drooping lids. Her thin bosom shrugged convulsively. He stared back at her, devilish and unchanging. With another strange, sick convulsion, she turned away, as if she were sick, could feel dissolution setting-on in her body. For with her mind she was unable to attend to his words, he caught her, as it were, beneath all her defences, and destroyed her with some hideous occult potency'.

This, then, is Hermione when her will has lost its illusion of command, her 'personality' has collapsed, and she feels herself for the moment nothing but the play of chaotic forces that the 'mental consciousness' had excluded. We should have found ourselves ready enough to take the significance, since the art of *Women in Love* is, with such endless resource, preoccupied with evoking the deeper life of the psyche; that life which, under the drama of relations between the characters at the level of the social 'personality', makes itself felt as a kind of latent drama of fields of force, a drama out of which disconcerting effects may emerge at the upper level, where the characters feel themselves to be wills and consciousnesses.

Hermione, we are told, immediately after the passage last quoted, 'came down to dinner strange and sepulchral, her eyes heavy and full of sepulchral darkness'. In the atmosphere of social-intellectual talk at the brilliant dinner-table her possessive will—her personality—rallies. 'She took very little part in the conversation, yet she heard it all, it was all hers'. The talk continues after dinner in the drawing-room, and, sensitized as we are, we take the potent suggestion that all this excited intellectuality has beneath it energies of a wholly different order from the interest in ideas that the talkers are conscious of:

> 'The talk was very often political or sociological, and interesting, curiously anarchistic. There was an accumulation of powerful

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force in the room, powerful and destructive. Everything seemed to be thrown into the melting pot, and it seemed to Ursula they were all witches, helping the pot to bubble. There was an elation and a satisfaction in it all, but it was cruelly exhausting for the newcomers, this ruthless mental pressure, this powerful, consuming, destructive mentality that emanated from Joshua and Hermione and Birkin and dominated the rest'.

The pressure of destructive mentality, or the main incitement to it, we realize, derives from Hermione, and registers her desperate effort of self-recovery. The significance is clear enough when we are told:

'But a sickness, a fearful nausea gathered possession of Hermione. There was a lull in the talk, as it was arrested by her unconscious but all-powerful will'.

She proposes dancing, rings the bell for costumes, tells off the dancers, and it begins. It is dance-miming, and I need not analyse the ways in which it conveys the deep accompaniment that underlies the overt drama—underlies the play, in and between the characters, of conscious intention, feeling and thought. But since what we have in view is the climax to come between Hermione and Birkin, there is a passage that should be quoted:

'Birkin, when he could get free from the weight of the people present, whom he disliked, danced rapidly and with a real gaiety. And how Hermione hated him for this irresponsible gaiety.

"Now I see", cried the Contessa excitedly, watching his purely gay motion, which he had all to himself. "Mr. Birkin is a changer".

Hermione looked at her coldly, and shuddered, knowing that only a foreigner could have seen and have said this.

"Cosa vuol' dire, Palestra?" she asked, sing-song.

"Look," said the Contessa in Italian. "He is not a man, he is a chameleon, a creature of change".

"He is not a man, he is treacherous, not one of us", said itself over in Hermione's consciousness. And her soul writhed in the black subjugation to him, because of his power to escape, to exist, other than she did, because he was not consistent, not a man, less than a man. She hated him in a despair that shattered her and broke her down. . . .'

The changeableness perceived in Birkin is a capacity for surrender to the spontaneous life that will cannot command. Hermione feels it as something lethal and insufferable, because it denies the competence of will and idea for the rôle assigned to them in her psyche, and denies it in the most disturbing way, by assuring her that she cannot hope to take that possessive hold of Birkin which alone, she feels, could remedy the insufficiency from which will cannot save her.

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To take note of everything in this highly complex and brilliantly successful chapter would demand inordinate space. Enough has been said to suggest how the discussion, towards its close, of political and social ideas, in which Gerald expounds his functionalism, reducing human life to instrumentality, and in which Hermione proclaims that 'in the *spirit* we are all one', can be at the same time, and be convincingly, so intense a personal crisis between Hermione and Birkin that it can end in the murderous violence of that blow upon the head.

The discussion comes convincingly as in the natural course of an intellectual house-party. The ideas expressed in it engage immediately, such is the force of Lawrence's art and his mastery of organization, the essential themes of the book (themes that are presented in terms of individual lives). Birkin, in contradicting Hermione, as, out of intense conviction as well as exasperation, he is bound to do, makes, characteristically, and with wholly felicitous relevance to the general discussion, his affirmation of the Laurentian truth that 'One man isn't any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically *other*'. He is not only affronting Hermione's idealism; in asserting 'otherness' he asserts the vanity of the will that seeks after possessive 'knowledge'.

In the same way, though the major event in which the whole action of *Women in Love* resolves itself, Gerald's death in the snow, doesn't belong to the familiar kind of dramatic climax, but is a resolution below the level of personality, it nevertheless comes as the inevitable upshot of a drama enacted by human individuals as recognizable and as intelligibly motivated as any in fiction. And Gerald's case reminds us that it is the scope as well as the depth of Lawrence's significances that has led to the kind of incomprehension typified by Murry: Lawrence's preoccupation with relating the overt expressions of personal life to the impersonal depths goes with his power of presenting in the malady of the individual psyche the large movement of civilization. It is because it gives so much, and gives the unexpected, that *Women in Love* has been judged to give less than the reader has the right to demand.

For it must be insisted that the profundity of Lawrence's interests in human life doesn't mean any lack of interest in the individual. Or, rather, there is no need to insist: no one could be in less danger than Lawrence of forgetting the truth that life is a matter of individual lives. In fact, as his affirmation of 'otherness' implies (together with his hatred of 'merging'), he lays peculiar stress on individuality. And not only are the main characters of *Women in Love, pace* Murry, thoroughly individualized; Lawrence's natural genius for the rendering of character shows itself, as a kind of Dickensian creativeness, in the rendering of the minor figures. The German party at the hostel in chapter XXIX ('Continental') seems to be done with a gusto of appreciative response. Then take the episode (chapter XXVI) of the woman and her captive man to whom Birkin and Ursula give the chair they have just bought: we

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have here something very different from gusto, but in an equally notable degree we have that specific kind of creative power which is generally supposed to constitute a novelist.

There is no need, however, to enforce the point by multiplying illustrations or to show in detail how completely (and significantly) Gudrun and Ursula are differentiated. The facts are manifestly and abundantly what they are, and only the kind of wrong-headed approach, with the consequent exasperation, exemplified in an extreme form by Murry, can account for any report to the contrary. Rather in closing this examination of *Women in Love*, I will revert to those aspects of Lawrence's astonishingly original art which, in the rendering of the manifestations of life in the actors, are *not* concerned with 'character'. The ways in which Lawrence brings into the drama the forces of the psyche of which the actors' wills have no cognizance, and which, consequently, do not seem to belong to their selves, are very various. There may, however, be some point in adducing a major illustration of a kind of thing for which ordinary notions of what should be found in a novel have no place.

There is the episode of the rabbit in the chapter (XVIII) called after it. How does this chapter advance the action of the novel? readers have no doubt asked. What can it be said to do to justify its presence, which is a very emphatic one? The vividness and the disturbing quality are beyond question; but in what ways are they relevant in *Women in Love*? Do they not belong rather to an independent and highly Laurentian short-story or sketch that is loosely brought in here—as (it might be alleged) so much is brought into *Women in Love* in default of any pressure of significance? The child, Winifred Crich, is wonderfully done, here and elsewhere—in the rendering of children Lawrence, it seems to me, has no rival. We are given the French governess—her 'neat, brittle finality of form', 'like some elegant beetle with thin ankles . . . how repulsive her completeness and her finality was'—with characteristic vivid economy. The storm of frenetic violence emanating from the rabbit has a disturbing immediacy of effect as we read. But the only major characters figuring in the chapter are Gerald and Gudrun, to whom falls the problem of dealing with the possessed resistance of the brute, and for them the episode seems wholly incidental and marginal. In what way does it leave them or their relations different from what they were before? The question cannot be satisfactorily replied to at the level of the expectations going with the drama of 'characters'. Yet, in relation to the essential themes of *Women in Love* the episode is charged with significance. There is no need to analyse here how, in the violence of response engendered in Gerald and Gudrun by the struggle with the rabbit there is engendered too an effect as of a dangerous field of force between the lovers—an intimation, not even now taken by their conscious minds, of latent tensions and potential conflict. The nature of the significance is suggested well enough in such places as these:

> 'The long, demon-like beast lashed out again, spread on the air as if it were flying, looking something like a dragon, then

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closing up again, inconceivably powerful and explosive. The man's body, strung to its efforts, vibrated strongly. Then a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came the unearthly abhorrent scream of a rabbit in the fear of death. It made one immense writhe, tore his wrists and his sleeve in a final convulsion, all its belly flashed white in a whirlwind of paws, and then he had slung it round and had it under his arm, fast. It cowered and skulked. His face was gleaming with a smile.

"You wouldn't think there was all that force in a rabbit", he said, looking at Gudrun. And he saw her eyes black as night in her pallid face, she looked almost unearthly. The scream of the rabbit, after the violent tussle, seemed to have torn the veil of her consciousness. He looked at her, and the whitish, electric gleam in his face intensified.

"Isn't it a *fool*!" she cried. "Isn't it a sickening *fool*?" The vindictive mockery in her voice made his brain quiver. Glancing up at him, into his eyes, she revealed again the mocking, white-cruel recognition. There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries.

"How many scratches have you?" he asked, showing his hard forearm, white and hard and torn in red gashes.

"How really vile!" she cried, flushing with a sinister vision. "Mine is nothing".

She lifted her arm and showed a deep red score down the silken white flesh.

"What a devil!" he exclaimed. But it was as if he had had knowledge of her in the long red rent of her forearm, so silken and soft. He did not want to touch her. He would have to make himself touch her, deliberately. The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain. . . .'

Gudrun's wanton provocation of the Highland cattle in chapter XIV ('Water-party') is the last instance I can allow myself to refer to. The general bearings of the incident on the potentialities of her relations with Gerald should be plain enough. To sum up the significance is another matter: the whole remarkable chapter is very complex, closely organized, and highly charged. It will be noticed that I have avoided the terms 'symbol' and 'symbolism' in this discussion: to suggest that the rabbit and the cattle 'stand for' this and that would be to suggest much simpler ways of constructing and conveying significance, and much simpler significances, than we actually have. The point may be made by turning for comparison to instances of what can, without misleading effect, be called symbolism. We have such an instance when, after the episode of the Highland cattle, Gerald and Gudrun sit at either end of the canoe they have elected to share, returning to the other end of the lake:

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'You like this, do you?' she said, in a gentle solicitous voice. He laughed shortly.

'There is a space between us', he said, in the same low, unconscious voice, as if something were speaking out of him. And she was as if magically aware of their being balanced in separation, in the boat. She swooned with acute comprehension and pleasure.

'But I'm very near', she said caressively, gaily.

'Yet distant, distant', he said.

What is symbolized is that normative relation between the man and the woman which Birkin ultimately achieves with Ursula, and in which alone Gerald can escape disaster. A little further on we are given Gerald's new sense—for him new and unprecedented—of spontaneous life in the relaxed whole psyche:

> He was listening to the faint near sounds, the dropping of water-drops from the oar-blades, the slight drumming of the lanterns behind him, as they rubbed against one another, the occasional rustling of Gudrun's full skirt, an alien land noise. His mind was almost submerged, he was almost transfused, lapsed out for the first time in his life, into the things about him. For he always kept such a keen attentiveness, concentrated and unyielding in himself. Now he had let go, imperceptively he was melting into oneness with the whole. It was like pure, perfect sleep, his first great sleep of life. He had been so insistent, so guarded, all his life. But here was sleep, and peace, and perfect lapsing out.

And, symbolically too, this transcending of that sense of imminent disaster which underlies Gerald's characteristically tensed will breaks when the stillness of the serene night is shattered:

> And again they were still. The launch twanged and hooted, somebody was singing. Then as if the night smashed, suddenly there was a great shout, a confusion of shouting, warring on the water, then the horrid noise of paddles reversed and churned violently.
>
> Gerald sat up, and Gudrun looked at him in fear. 'Somebody in the water', he said, angrily, and desperately, looking keenly across the dusk. . . .
>
> 'Wasn't this *bound* to happen?' said Gudrun, with heavy hateful irony. . . . She glanced at his face. He was looking fixedly into the darkness, very keen and alert and single in himself, instrumental. Her heart sank, she seemed to die a death. 'Of course', she said to herself, 'nobody will be drowned. Of course they won't. It would be too extravagant and sensational'. But her heart was cold, because of his sharp impersonal face. It was as if he belonged naturally to dread and catastrophe, as if he were himself again.
>
> Then there came a child's voice, a girl's high, piercing shriek:
>
> 'Di—Di—Di—Di—Oh Di—Oh Di—Oh Di!'
>
> The blood ran cold in Gudrun's veins.

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Then, when Gerald dives into the black depths of the lake, seeking in vain for the vanished pair, Diana Crich and her would-be-rescuer, there is, for the reader who recalls the earlier chapter (IV), 'Diver', a clear symbolism. On that earlier occasion Gerald's man-of-action mastery on the surface of the water, the plane of will and mental consciousness, had evoked in Gudrun a passionate envy —and evoked too Ursula's account (the sinister resonance of which is amplified now) of Gerald's boyhood: 'You know he shot his brother?' He now, with a horribly disturbing and chilling effect, conveys his sense of the strange vast world beneath the surface, a world where he is helpless and hopeless:

> 'If you once die', he said, 'then when it's over, it's finished. Why come to life again? There's room under that water there for thousands'.
>
> 'Two is enough', she said murmuring.
>
> He dragged on his second shoe. He was shivering violently, and his jaw shook as he spoke.
>
> 'That's true', he said, 'maybe. But it's curious how much room there seems, a whole universe under there; and as cold as hell, you're as helpless as if your head was cut off'. He could scarcely speak, he shook so violently. 'There's one thing about our family, you know', he continued. 'Once anything goes wrong, it can never be put right again—not with us. I've noticed it all my life—you can't put a thing right once it has gone wrong'.
>
> They were walking across the high-road to the house.
>
> And do you know, when you are down there, it is so cold, actually, and so endless, so different really from what it is on top, so endless—you wonder how it is so many are alive, why we're up here'.

Then again, replacing with an ironical response the suggestion of the balanced pair in the canoe, there is an anticipatory symbolism in this:

> 'The bodies of the dead were not recovered till towards dawn. Diana had her arms tight round the neck of the young man, choking him'.

But these effects work subtly in with the whole complex organization of poetic and dramatic means that forms this wonderful chapter, means that, in sum, are no more to be brought helpfully under the limiting suggestion of 'symbolism' than the Shakespearean means in an act of *Macbeth*.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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MATTHEW ARNOLD, H.M.I.

THE appearance of Dr. Connell's book on the educational thought and influence of Matthew Arnold[1] provides a timely opportunity for a re-assessment of Arnold's educational importance. Had Dr. Connell done his work rather more adequately, such an essay as this would have been unnecessary; a review would have sufficed to stress the importance of the undertaking and to draw the attention of the reader to the significant points. But the book, though conscientious and informative, turns out to be confused; its author seems to possess too little understanding of what, fundamentally, Matthew Arnold was about, and is, moreover, unrevealing as to the significance of Matthew Arnold's position for to-day, in the particular educational situation that we now find ourselves; so that some clarification, however inadequate in the length of an article, seems to be desirable.

The importance of Matthew Arnold as an educationalist—the reason why, to-day, we need so much to turn to him for light—seems to me to lie in at least two directions. There is his diagnosis of a particular cultural situation, a situation which since Arnold's day has not only grown worse, but has grown worse along the lines that Arnold indicated; and there is his appreciation of the necessity of tackling the current degeneration of standards by a clear-sighted understanding of essential distinctions to be made between means and ends.

His diagnosis of the cultural illness of his society is perhaps too well known to need much detailed description. He saw clearly the cultural consequences of there being no centre of enlightened opinion that might at once set and correct the cultural standards of the age. Matthew Arnold's 'Culture' was, of course, a self-consciously acquired taste and appreciation that he thought contact with the 'best which has been thought and said in the world' would bring; at the same time, it involved a protest against the romantic idea that the source of enlightenment lay within the self. It implied the reassertion of a classical ideal and involved a submission to an external discipline, a discipline that was regarded as something creative and refining, not stultifying and deadening. For, indeed, Arnold was much concerned with the dangers of 'doing as one likes.' He realized that genuine creativity was the product of a co-operation between the man and the moment, that 'the creative power has, for its happy exercise, appointed elements, and those elements are not in its own control'.[2] Something much more than the projection of the self was needed.

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[1] *The Educational Thought and Influence of Matthew Arnold*, by W. F. Connell (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.) 21/-.

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In view of the importance of this notion of Matthew Arnold's, and of its educational implications, it would be well to examine it a little more closely. Arnold was aware that, in a sense, the only sort of environment which could be vital in his own day was what might be termed a 'substitute' environment. Genuine creative literary genius, he thought, lay 'in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them. . . . But it must have the atmosphere, it must find itself amidst the order of ideas, in order to work freely'.[3] And as Arnold was only too well aware, 'these it is not so easy to command'. Certainly, they were not commanded in mid-Victorian England . Hence the importance of books and reading. Arnold was quite clear that sustained reading was only a substitute, that what was really required was a society 'permeated by fresh thought, intelligent and alive . . . all the books and reading in the world are only valuable as they are helps to this'.[4] But, and at the present day, when there is little likelihood of a national resurgence of vitality of the sort Arnold desired, this seems a point worth insisting on: 'books and reading may enable a man to construct a kind of semblance of it in his own mind, a world of knowledge and intelligence in which he may live and work'.[5]

Hence the need for the exercise of the critical intelligence, to help in the creation of a 'quickening and sustaining atmosphere'; hence, too, the necessity of a centre of enlightened opinion, which would help to sustain this atmosphere, and to correct the 'provinciality' that marred so many of the ideas and so much of the expression of English writers:

> 'The less a literature has felt the influence of a supposed centre of correct information, correct judgment, correct taste, the more we shall find in it this note of provinciality. . . . The note of provinciality from the want of a centre of correct taste is still more visible, and it is still more common. For here great—even the greatest—powers of mind most fail a man. Great powers of mind will make him inform himself thoroughly, great powers of mind will make him think profoundly, even with ignorance and platitude all round him; but not even great powers of mind will keep his taste and style perfectly sound and sure, if he is left too much to himself, with no 'sovereign organ of opinion' in these matters, near him'.[6]

Now Arnold makes it quite clear that it is not only in the comparatively narrow field of literary composition and taste that life is impoverished by the absence of some such centre as he adumbrates. The whole of social life, the whole of living needs to be constantly freshened by an influx of new and fresh ideas. For it is important to insist that, ultimately, Arnold's conception of culture was pragmatic (in contrast, for instance, to Newman's idea of 'liberal knowledge' as knowledge 'independent of sequel', which 'stands on its

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[2]Matthew Arnold: *The Function of Criticism.* [3]*Ibid.*
[4]*Ibid.* [5]*Ibid.* [6]Arnold: *The Literary Influence of Academies.*

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own pretensions') even if his pragmatic aim included elements that the pragmatic thinkers proper would hardly have acquiesced in. He was aware of the necessity of a certain detachment from the social scene: 'Criticism must maintain its independence of the practical spirit and its aims. Even with well-meant efforts of the practical spirit it must express dissatisfaction, if in the sphere of the ideal they seem impoverishing and limiting. It must not hurry on to the goal because of its practical importance. It must be patient and know how to wait; and flexible, and know how to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them'.[7] Moreover, he was concerned to stress the notion of culture as an inward condition, a necessary attribute of 'being': 'culture . . . places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality'.[8]

Yet in spite of this insistence on detachment and inwardness, Arnold was very clear that culture served a social purpose; it was merely that his conception of society was a larger one than might be allowed by the practical minds of the age. He is at great pains to defend his notion of culture from the charge of social selfishness. His view of it, as Dr. Connell rightly points out, was a dynamic one: 'Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming is the character of perfection as culture conceives it'.[9] Moreover, 'perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated. The individual is required, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march towards perfection, to be continually doing all he can to enlarge and increase the volume of the human stream sweeping thitherward'.[10] And it must not be forgotten that 'men of culture are the true apostles of equality'.[11] The aim was to 'make reason and the will of God *prevail*'.[12] But in so doing, it was necessary to stand aside from many of the more immediate demands for social activity, *reculer pour mieux sauter*, as it were. Arnold's ideal was analogous to that of the Guru in L. H. Myers' *The Pool of Vishnu*: 'Into loneliness the spirit by its nature swings; and as it is only in communion and action that man learns, so it is only in loneliness that he discovers what he has learnt. Nevertheless, from his solitude—yes, and from communion—man must always return'. It is perhaps a fault in Arnold, about which more will have to be said later, that he understressed the necessity of learning from communion and action. But it is important that he realized that those who can best serve the world are those who are capable of abstracting themselves from immediate experience, in order to gain a vantage point from which a problem can be seen in a wider context. It was, perhaps ,part of the price to pay for the steadiness of view, the check against coarse and ill-regulated action, that there was sometimes a danger lest remoteness should entail a certain misconstruing.

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[7]Arnold: *The Function of Criticism*. [8]Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy*.
[9]*Ibid*. [10]*Ibid*. [11]*Ibid*. [12]*Ibid*.

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It is this capacity for detachment, for seeing that culture was not a matter of selfish ease, but was directly related to the ***quality*** of living at any one time, for realizing that problems of quality were not irrelevant in a society concerned more and more to stress action for action's sake, that marks out Arnold's significant contribution to the problem of education. And lest it should seem that such matters are remote from the every-day concerns of educationalists, a comparison of Arnold's position with that of John Dewey, who perhaps more than any other thinker, has shaped modern educational policy, will bring out the significance of Arnold's view for us to-day. There is indeed a certain relevance in the comparison, for Dewey represents an aspect of that Americanisation that Arnold so feared and condemned.

The two are not divided by any fundamental divergence of aim; for both regard social action, variously conceived, as the ultimate purpose of education. What divides them lies in Arnold's appreciation of the extent to which 'becoming' (social action) is enriched by the nature of 'being' (the richness of the individual's understanding). And something of the measure of the difference between the two can be seen in the difference of stress that they place on the value of the inner life.

We have already noted the emphasis Arnold placed on 'being'; only by a personal enrichment could the individual in turn enrich the society of his time, be enabled to turn on it a stream of new and fresh ideas. But such an enrichment implied a temporary withdrawal, a detachment. It is obvious that Dewey is much more nearly involved in the immediacies of the social process than Arnold:

> 'The idea of perfecting an " inner" personality is a sure sign of social divisions. What is called inner is simply that which does not connect with others—which is not capable of free and full communication. What is termed spiritual culture has usually been futile, with something rotten about it, just because it has been conceived as a thing which a man might have internally—and therefore exclusively. What one is as a person is what one is as associated with others, in a free give and take of intercourse'.[13]

The important sentence is the last one. To Dewey, the personality which is valid is that which involves a constant surrender of 'being' to 'becoming,' of 'inner' personality to social process; for he will allow the individual no valid state of being other than that acquired in the social intercourse of 'free and full communication'. Dewey's notions are based on his assumption that democracy, conceived as a 'mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience',[14] is the only possible form of government; to this all his ideas on education and social living are geared. The necessity of doing away with all aspects of external authority causes him to define the aims of education as falling within the scope of the educative process

[13]Dewey: *Democracy and Education.* [14]*Ibid.*

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instead of being externally conceived: 'In our search for aims in education, we are not concerned . . . with finding an end outside of the educative process to which education is subordinate. Our whole conception forbids'[15]; and there is the more general statement that 'education . . . is a process of living and not a preparation for future living'.[16] Dewey's use of language is frequently deplorably loose; nevertheless it seems clear from these statements that 'being' has surrendered to 'becoming' and that 'process' (Dewey often uses the terms 'change', 'growth' as well) is all important. This he makes quite explicit when he states: 'Since education is not a means to living, but is identical with the operation of living a life which is fruitful and inherently significant, the only ultimate value that can be set up is just the process of living itself'.[17]

Now such ideas make it difficult to make relevant distinctions of value. Dewey, of course, is not unaware of the problem of value. He is aware that not any and every manifestation of energy is of equal value; but it is difficult to see on what grounds he distinguishes between one activity and another. His standard seems to involve what he calls the 'intrinsic continuity' of the activity, as opposed to a 'mere serial aggregate of acts, first doing one thing and then another'. By 'intrinsic continuity' of an activity he seems to imply purposive activity aiming at a preconceived end, an end preconceived, that is to say, by the person entering into the activity; 'The aim as a foreseen end gives direction to the activity; it is not an idle view of a mere spectator, but influences the steps taken to reach the end'.[18] He expressly cuts out externally imposed ends: 'To talk about an educational aim when approximately each act of a pupil is dictated by the teacher, when the only order in the sequence of his acts is that which comes from the assignment of lessons and the giving of directions by another, is to talk nonsense'.[19] Thus the conceiving of ends is restricted to the capacity of the individual to see possibilities at any one moment; and thus the individual's opportunity for mental growth, for being, are seriously curtailed. The dichotomy between 'preparation for living' and 'process of living', of course, is a false one. For education as a preparation for living involves a living through such a preparation. There is an ambiguity in the significance of the word 'living'. What Dewey means by 'living' in the phrase 'process of living' is what Arnold means when he speaks of 'swimming with the stream'; the idea of 'preparation' implies that standing aside from immediate demands for social action which Arnold's notion of 'detachment' and 'disinterestedness' recommends. The difference is one of degree, not of kind; but it involves a difference of qualitive response to the social situation. Arnold realized that fulness of 'being' led to enrichment of 'becoming'; paradoxically, Dewey, who is so concerned with 'process' and 'growth', by his repudiation of

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[15]Dewey: *Democracy and Education.* [16]Dewey.
[17]Dewey: *Democracy and Education.*
[18]*Ibid.* [19]*Ibid.*

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'inner' cultivation, reaps a thinner harvest.

Now considerations such as these are important in immediate and concrete educational situations; for a great deal of our schooling at present is being geared to meet immediate demands for social experience. When the modern teacher is faced with the problem, say, of whether to read poetry with his class or take them on a visit to the local tram sheds, the modern demand for 'social living' and the modern contempt for bookishness leads him to regard the latter as the more important educational exercise. Admittedly he must consider the capabilities of his class; but there are few children who, if adequately taught, could not get more permanent enrichment of personality from the poetry lesson. That does not mean to say that visits to the tram sheds should be entirely cut out; for indeed such visits, and visits of a like nature, have their relevance to the poetry lesson. It is merely that teachers should become more clear in their minds about the distinction between immediate and further ends. What operates at the moment is a sort of Gresham's law; the current debasement of social life, its materialism, its emphasis on what Arnold called 'random and ill-regulated' action, in its turn restricts the scope of possible educational endeavour, largely because the modern notion that education is primarily to serve a social end confines educational thinking within the boundaries of the social purposes of the day.

It is for reasons of this sort that Arnold is so important as a corrective. For Arnold realized the distinction which we have forgotten, the distinction between mechanical and 'vital' knowledge. He saw quite clearly that certain types of activity, certain social aims were not sufficiently important to be conceived of as ends, but were to be regarded as only means to further more important ends:

> 'Faith in machinery is . . . our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it had a value in and for itself. What is freedom but machinery? What is population but machinery? What is coal but machinery? What are railroads but machinery? What is wealth but machinery? What are, even, religious organizations but machinery? Now almost every voice in England is accustomed to speak of these things as if they were precious ends in themselves, and therefore had some of the characters of perfection indisputably joined to them'.[20]

In his comments on the curricula of the elementary schools with which, as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, Matthew Arnold was in contact for thirty-five years, he makes the same essential distinctions. It informs the whole spirit with which he approached his work, for he conceived that the 'true aim of schools and instruction is to develop the powers of our mind and give us access to vital knowledge'.[21] Some subjects did this; they were what he calls 'formative',

[20]Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy*. [21]Arnold: *Schools and Universities*.

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and on the necessity of 'formative' instruction he insists time and time again. In his earliest report he was struck, in examining the pupil teachers, 'with the utter disproportion between the great amount of positive information and the low degree of mental culture which they exhibit'.[22] He criticized the elementary schools because he saw that the bulk of the instruction had 'nothing of that formative character which in education is demanded. As regards sewing, calculating, writing, spelling, this is evident. They are necessary, they have utility, but they are not formative'.[23] And again, 'The great fault of the instruction in our elementary schools is, that it at most gives to a child the mechanical possession of the instruments of knowledge, but does nothing to *form* him, to put him in the way of making the best possible use of them'.[24] Moreover, he saw that this forming power must adapt itself to the child: 'his age, capacity and school time, must in the end govern our proceedings. Undoubtedly there is a danger at present of his being over-urged and over-worked, of his being taught too many things, and not the best things for him'.[25] He objected to the revised code because it made the job of teaching a mechanical exercise, the aim being not to educate the child but to pass a specific test; in addition it involved a change in the function of the inspector. The real purpose of the inspector's visit, as Arnold saw, was 'to test and quicken the intellectual life of the school'; the new test threw upon the inspector such 'a mass of minute detail' that he no longer had the 'needful freshness and spirit (to conduct the old inspection needed a good deal of spirit)'[26] to perform what Arnold properly regarded as the more vital function.

Thus Arnold displays constantly the capacity of a cultivated mind to make valid distinctions between types of activity, to distinguish between those which serve as means and those which involve vital ends.

> 'But governing the teacher's whole design of instruction . . . should be the aim of calling forth, by some means or other, in every pupil a sense of pleasurable activity and creation; he should resist being made a mere ladder with "information".'[27]

The phrases 'pleasurable activity', 'creation' have a curiously modern ring; related to Arnold's advocacy of the teaching of English and such formative subjects, they have a validity they often do not possess in the hands of modern educationalists.

> 'People talk contemptuously of "learning lines by heart", but if a child is brought, as he easily can be brought, to *throw himself*

[22]Arnold: *General Report for 1852.*
[23]*General Report for 1878.*
[24]*General Report for 1872.*
[25]*General Report for 1882.*
[26]*General Report for 1863.*
[27]*General Report for 1882.*

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> *into* a piece of poetry, an exercise of creative activity has been set up in him quite different from the effort of learning a list of words to spell, or a list of flesh-making and heat-giving foods, or a list of capes and bays, or a list of reigns and battles. . . .'[28]

If it would perhaps be wise to lay less emphasis on actual learning by heart than Arnold advocates, it must be remembered that Arnold stressed the importance of full comprehension of what was being learnt, and the need to consider the standard of what was so chosen. For 'good poetry is formative. . . . But of course the good of poetry is not really got unless the sense of the words is known'.[29] What matters, however, is that Arnold realized that genuine creativity was an attribute of the child in relation to a particular mental atmosphere, not, as so many of what Arnold would have contemptuously dismissed as 'scientific educators' would wish to conceive it, a purely personal attribute of the child; so that children nowadays are encouraged to be 'creative' in a vacuum, as it were, without the mental stimulus that only subject-matter of value, and the direct intervention of the teacher can provide. Hence the importance of Arnold's insistence that the teachers should have a high standard of culture:

> 'It is . . . sufficiently clear, that the teacher to whom you give only a drudge's training, will do only a drudge's work, and will do it in a drudge's spirit: that in order to ensure good instruction even within narrow limits in a school, you must provide it with a master far superior to his scholars'.[30]

At a time when the advocates of a narrow vocational training in the Training Colleges are becoming increasingly vocal, Arnold's words deserve the widest currency.

For Arnold, it is important to remember, was the heir to a tradition which saw life in terms of conflict rather than of evolutionary development; it was a tradition that even in Arnold's day was fading fast before the notion of 'progress', but it still had sufficient vitality for Arnold to see the discrepancy between 'natural' man and 'moral' man, a discrepancy which he expressed in the form of the distinction between the 'ordinary self' and the 'best self'. Behind such notions is a Christian tradition which stretches back to the Middle Ages, a tradition which, for instance, gave vitality to Macbeth's speech, 'If 'twere done when 'tis done'. Shakespeare, unlike Arnold, lived at a time which retained a vital conception of evil; by Arnold's day, the notion which has reduced evildoing to the status of social misdemeanour was already active. Arnold himself is a portent, for it is perhaps not unjust to say that the conflicts he deals with are those which affect his taste rather than raise the fundamentals of human existence. One way of

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[28] *General Report for 1882.*
[29] *General Report for 1878.*
[30] *General Report for 1855.*

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putting it would be to say that Arnold was no Dostoievsky; at least the calling to mind of the sorts of issues that occupied the great Russian does something to indicate the very real restriction of scope which marked the work of the Englishman.[31] The fact that a girl has murdered her baby and is in custody leads Arnold to shrink from the sentimental picture of pathos that his mind paints for him —he seems almost as much affected by the ugliness of the name 'Wragg' as by the eschatological possibilities of the situation; at least, this is what he mentions first. Dostoievsky used his newspaper reports to different effect. I think Mr. Eliot has something of this sort of thing in mind when he denies to Arnold "the vision of the horror and the glory'.

Now such considerations do not seem to me entirely irrelevant to an estimate of the importance of Matthew Arnold's views on culture and education. For there is a certain tenuity in his experience, a tenuity that for instance mars his poetry. Despite the importance of his notion of culture, his conception of culture does not entirely escape from such a tenuousness. His social experience seems oddly restricted, although his inspectatorial duties must have revealed many aspects of social life to him that would have been hidden from his contemporaries. In speaking of the lower classes he says in condemnation, 'And so they are thrown back upon themselves, upon their beer, their gin, and their *fun*'.[32] In that deprecatory sentence I think we find the clue to the comparative narrowness of Arnold's outlook. It is symptomatic of a state of society where the distinctions between the classes had reached unhealthy proportions; it is symptomatic of a personal outlook which is cut off from seeing the function of the 'fun' in relation to the lives and satisfactions of the people. Other writers had not despised the 'fun' of the people; but Arnold's rejection of it gives us an indication of why he never saw the problems of the elementary school children in relation to their background.

Now it is considerations of this sort that go to explain a certain disappointment, difficult to define, but none the less insistent, that one feels, for instance, with Arnold's school reports. They are full of intelligent remarks, as a consideration of some of the quotations given above should indicate; and yet there is something lacking. Why is it that one feels that even in Arnold's stress on the formative importance of certain studies one has the suspicion that there was something mechanical in his application of his own principle. He stresses the importance of the study of English; one agrees. He urges adequate standards; again one concurs. And yet, when one asks what English studies in the elementary schools meant to Arnold, one has a feeling of disappointment:

'The animation of mind, the multiplying of ideas, the prompt-

[31]The comparison may seem quite irrelevant; but it was part of Arnold's own practice to make use of what he called 'touchstones'.
[32]Arnold: *Mixed Essays*.

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ness to connect, in the thoughts, one thing with another, and to illustrate one thing by another, are what are wanted; just what *letters*, as they are called, are supposed to communicate. . . . The grammar paper is that paper in their examination which most directly deals with letters, properly so called, and which best shows us, therefore, the amount of the candidate's hold upon letters, and the chance of his communicating the power of letters to others.

The candidate has to paraphrase a passage of English poetry, and no exercise can better show his range of ideas and quickness of apprehension. He has to parse and analyse sentences, and no exercise can better show his clearness of understanding and his power of reasoning. He has to answer a few questions about our own language or literature. Altogether, the paper is one which tests his information, judgment, and those more thoroughly than any other of his papers tests them'.[33]

After the felicity of the opening, one has a feeling of being let down in the rest of the passage. When one sees the passage of Campbell that these pupil-teachers of eighteen or nineteen are being asked to paraphrase and notes Arnold's comment: 'to paraphrase a few lines such as those from Campbell is as good a proof of general intelligence as any that could be required or given', one's bewilderment increases; even though a little later Arnold inconsistently admits that Campbell's poem has 'no great merit', and the particular stanza 'too hard' for the candidates. Arnold inveighs against learning lists of facts by rote; but he constantly urges the necessity of learning poetry by heart, because such an exercise he regards as 'formative'.

It would not be fair to blame Arnold for not knowing as much about the process of learning as we now know as a result of recent and persistent research. It is merely that one wonders why Arnold did not investigate a little more persistently the end products of the system of education he was paid to inspect. An understanding of the child mind was not beyond the Victorians, as George Eliot shows. Arnold's criticisms, so far as they go, are nearly always felicitous; but he never seems to have attempted to see the system as a whole, or to have seen its relevance to the state of culture that he so accurately and adequately criticised. Why, for instance is there nothing in Arnold's criticism as radical as these observations by George Bourne, made by a man who had no intimate knowledge of the educational system, but who saw the effects of the sort of education that even Arnold tended to be too complacent about? Bourne is discussing the monotony of a coal-carter's life, now that the old satisfactions of village life have gone:

'But it goes almost without saying that the man's "education" did very little to enrich his mind. . . . (The) defect (of his schooling) was that it failed to initiate him into the inner signifi-

[33]Arnold: *Report for 1874*.

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> cance of information in general, and failed wholly to start him on the path of learning. It was sterile of results. It opened to him no view, no vista; set up in his brain no stir of activity such as could continue after he had left school; and this for the reason those simple items of knowledge which it conveyed to him were too scrappy and too few to begin running together into any understanding of the larger aspects of life. A few rules of arithmetic, a little of the geography of the British Isles, a selection of anecdotes from the annals of the ancient Jews; no English history, no fairy-tales or romance, no inkling of the infinities of time and space, or of the riches of human thought; but merely a few 'pieces' of poetry and a few haphazard and detached observations (called 'Nature Study' nowadays) about familiar things. . . this was the jumble of stuff offered to the child's mind—a jumble to which it would puzzle a philosopher to give coherence. And what could a child get from it to kindle his enthusiasm for that civilized learning in which, none the less, it all may have its place? When the boy left school his 'education' had but barely begun'.

These remarks were made a number of years after Arnold retired; but they are equally relevant to his own day. To do Arnold justice, he did protest against the teaching of remote and unrelated facts: 'A child who has never heard of Paris or Edinburgh, will tell you the measurements of England in length and breadth, and square mileages, till his tongue is tired'; and there is more of the same sort of comment. But he never saw the system as a whole, never asked as Bourne asked and saw, what were the final results for culture. It is perhaps only a difference of emphasis; and yet, even more remarkable, there is so little apparent carry-over between Arnold the inspector and Arnold the social critic. For a person who was as interested as Arnold appeared to be in the state of contemporary culture, it is remarkable that he uses none of the detailed and intimate information about the state of mind of the nation that he could have acquired in his almost daily visits to schools and which might have helped both in diagnosis and in recommendation for cure. The one, of course, must have affected the other; and yet to read his social and critical works, one would never guess that Arnold had been for so long an inspector of schools. One is not surprised to read, in Dr. Connell's book, that Arnold never seems to have read any book of educational philosophy. His reports certainly are informed by the spirit that informs his criticism; but in the last resort one has the feeling that he wasn't deeply interested; and one is not surprised to read accounts of the hastiness and superficiality of his inspections.

The difference lies, perhaps, in the degree of warm human sympathy that the two men possessed. Bourne had not as profound a mind as Arnold; but he was deeply interested in people and in the intimacies of daily life. Because of this, he is able to see the effect, in terms of individual lives, of the school system—how unprepared their schooling has left 'the people' to face the problems of the new economy. He can see that a 'few pieces of poetry' have not had

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the 'formative' effect that Arnold hoped. Arnold sees the breakdown of culture in general terms rather than through the particularized analysis of the failure of incentives and satisfactions that gives Bourne's analysis in *Change in the Village* its validity. To call people Barbarians, Philistines or Populace is insufficient; what one needs to know is what the change-over from domestic to factory economy has meant to the intimate lives of the people, what, in fact, lies *behind* the current emphasis on 'machinery' in Arnold's metaphorical use of the term. Arnold had unique opportunities; one feels disappointed that he did not use them better. His appreciation of intimate effects need in no way have diminished his clear-sighted realization of the need for standards.

It is considerations of this sort that give a certain point to the criticisms of Arnold that Henry Sidgwick, one of the most acute of Victorian minds, printed in *Macmillan's Magazine,* in 1867. He charges Arnold with indefiniteness and vagueness; and he points out the inadequacy of Arnold's treatment of religion. More to the point, he has this to say about Arnold's criticism of action:

> 'All this criticism of action is very valuable; but it is usually given in excess, just because, I think, culture is a little sore in conscience, is uncomfortably eager to excuse its own evident incapacity for action. Culture is always hinting at a convenient season, that rarely seems to arrive. It is always suggesting one decisive blow that is to be gracefully given; but it is so difficult to strike quite harmoniously and without some derangement of attitude. Hence an instinctive, and, I think, irrational discouragement of the action on which less cultivated people are meanwhile spending themselves. For what does action, social action, really mean? It means losing oneself in a mass of disagreeable, hard, mechanical details, and trying to influence many dull or careless or bigoted people for the sake of ends that were at first of doubtful brilliancy, and are continually being dimmed and dwarfed by the clouds of conflict'.

For all one's admiration of Arnold, one cannot help appreciating some of the justice of this. A closer study of the 'disagreeable hard, mechanical details' of the life in the schools, a little more appreciation of the fundamental significance of what was going on, a little more willingness to throw himself into the task of making deep and valid yet particularized educational judgments, a little more of that enthusiasm that, as Sidgwick points out, religion had and that Arnold's culture deprecated, a profounder sympathy and insight that would have correlated Arnold, H.M.I., and Arnold, Prophet of Culture, so that there would have been an even more vital cross-fertilization than there actually was, might have given body and substance to culture and sweetness and light to mechanical details. Arnold might have become the greatest educational reformer this country has known. Instead, the reform of education has got into the wrong hands; the influence of superficial thinkers like Dewey has

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been too pervasive; and thus the revolution in English education that has taken place in the last twenty-five years has lacked that qualitative guidance that only a man like Arnold could have given it.

For education, the immediate work of the classroom, demands an attention to 'disagreeable, hard, mechanical details'; but such details need to be tempered by an imagination that can see them in a context. In education, there is necessary a constant interplay between the here and now (the homework to be set, the exercise to be marked, the lesson to be given) and the fullest possible appreciation of ultimate principles and purposes; so that the detail shall have its place within the purpose, and the purpose crystallize itself in terms of relevant detail. At the moment we suffer from a too restricted aim. The discovery by the schools of social purpose could have been envigorating and stimulating; certainly it involved an attempt to meet the sort of situation that George Bourne described. But 'social purpose' is a highly ambiguous phrase and 'society' a highly ambiguous concept. What is needed at the moment is a realization of the importance of qualitative considerations, that 'teaching them to live' (to adapt the title of a recent educational book), is not sufficient if the spirit that informs the living is a cheap and superficial one. That is why Arnold, despite his occasional weaknesses, is timely and salutary, more timely and salutary perhaps than even when he was alive. For what he was deficient in has more than been made good; and what he has to give was never more needed.

G. H. BANTOCK.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

KEYNES, SPENDER AND CURRENCY-VALUES

WORLD WITHIN WORLD, by Stephen Spender (Hamish Hamilton, 15/-).

THE LIFE OF JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES, by R. F. Harrod (Macmillan, 25/-).

> 'I *am* damned critical—for it's the only thing to be, and all else is damned humbug'—Henry James.

World Within World, the publisher's advertisement tells us, is in its thirtieth thousand, and has been highly praised by Cyril Connolly, Harold Nicolson, Christopher Isherwood, V. S. Pritchett, Walter Allen, Edgar Anstey, Raymond Mortimer, T. C. Worsley, Phyllis Bentley, Edmund Blunden, Richard Church, Leonard Woolf, John Connell, and the *Times Literary Supplement.* Nothing, then, said about it in *Scrutiny* can matter much to the author—a reflection that helps one to say what has to be said; for this is peculiarly a case where one wants it to be plain that all that one says, when constating the facts (which seem to be very important), is necessary to one's concern for general and impersonal significances.

What, then, makes Stephen Spender's autobiography worth attention is the extraordinary contrast between the account of the book conveyed by the reviewers and the patent enough reality. The reviewers (like the book) assume that the book is of great importance because of the established literary distinction of the author, and they find the high distinction of a gifted writer brilliantly present in the book itself. Yet any competent reviewer knowing nothing of the author would have been bound to deduce from the book that, of all professions, the literary was one for which he was certainly not intended by nature. The flatness of the writing is hard to convey by description, because it is an absence of character—unless one may say that it expresses the innocence that the reviewers (while concurring in the judgment that he is a 'born writer'—Mr. Leonard Woolf's phrase) all remark as a personal quality of the author. But as a literary quality this 'innocence' amounts to an essential lack of literary gift, and a bent for cliché and ineptitude.

> 'She was one of those girls whom the universities excite to a peculiar degree. She seemed literally bathed in the warm admiration of young men'.

> 'It always seemed to me that the Great War had made singularly little impression on him. He believed that we lived in an

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age of improvements, and not even that holocaust had shaken him in his belief'.

'She talked with many underlinings, in that way which is so consciously verbal with some women that it is their special idiom, as a special timbre of blank verse distinguishes each Elizabethan dramatist'.

'Yet her [Virginia Woolf's] interest in royalty was largely due to the fact that royalty, surrounded by an atmosphere of radiant adoration as though bathed in a tank of lambent water, were peculiar and exotic in precisely the way in which people are luminous and strange in her writing'.

The 'innocence' as the reviewers note it is what we have in the quality of his ambition to 'be a poet'—his answer, he records, when Mr. Eliot asked him what he wanted to do; to which Mr. Eliot replied, 'I can understand your wanting to write poems, but I don't quite know what you mean by "being a poet" '. The meaning, or the significance, is perfectly plain to us; Mr. Spender, with an admirable simplicity, has made it so. This is representative:

'When I realized that the desire to be Prime Minister was in itself only a thirst for notoriety, I shifted my ambition. Instead of wanting the fame that makes people discussed in the news, I looked to that which lasts for many years. I turned back to poetry. But although I wanted a truer fame, I cannot deny that I have never been free from a thirst for publicity very like that of my father. Even to-day it disgusts me to read a newspaper in which there is no mention of my name'.

The desire to become famous as a poet (and, if possible, as a statesman—and a soldier too) is one that many are familiar with, or will recall if they look back far enough. The astonishing thing about Mr. Spender's case is that he has achieved his desire—astonishing, because at no time has he given evidence of a more specific compulsion to poetry or to literary creation. And the passage is not, as a reader taking it in isolation might suppose, recording an outlived naïveté. The conversation in which Mr. Spender told Mr. Eliot that what he wanted to do was to 'be a poet' took place after he had published a book of poems, and 'begun to lead a literary-social life of luncheons, teas, and week-ends at country houses', and he reflects in recalling that conversation: 'My problem is what this book must make apparent: what I write are fragments of autobiography: sometimes they are poems, sometimes stories, and longer passages may take the form of novels'. Describing how he differed from the other leaders of The Poetical Renascence, 'As for me', he says, 'I was an autobiographer restlessly searching for forms in which to express the stages of my development'.

That the autobiographical bent is not a sign of creative power, but the reverse, we do not need Coleridge's authority for believing, and why Mr. Spender was driven back on autobiography, and how

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little conducive to creative strength this autobiographical material was calculated to be, he has already told us in an extract from his journal (given on p. 104):

> 'My own work is to write poetry and novels. I have no character or will power outside my work. In the life of action, I do everything that my friends tell me to do, and have no opinions of my own. This is shameful, I know, but it is so. Therefore I must develop that side of me which is independent of other people. I must live and mature in my writing'.

The absence of creative power or impulse needn't mean lack of literary intelligence. But Mr. Spender would seem never to have achieved even the beginnings of what can in any strictness be called an interest in literature.

> "Some of the writers who now came to interest me were T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Robert Graves, Laura Riding, Ernest Hemingway, Osbert, Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell, Ezra Pound, Henry Green, Herbert Read—to name a few. What I admired was their hard clear imagery, their boldness of experimentation and their search for expressing complicated states of consciousness'.

This was in his Oxford days, but the innocence is never transcended. He tells us that 'Day Lewis to some extent corrected the blurred quality of the Georgians by introducing images drawn from factories and slums and machinery into his poetry'. He can give as an anthology of supreme things: 'A sentence of Virginia Woolf's, beginning, "A great beast stamps its foot", a line of Eliot, "The awful daring of a moment's surrender", and, at a later date, a description of a rock pool by Cyril Connolly—all these seemed to be beyond the writers themselves, as the sceptre and the crown lie beyond the man who is a king'. He can tell us that Connolly is 'the best living parodist'—Connolly, who is capable of lumping James and Pater together under the head of 'mandarin prose', and of betraying the radical influence of Pater in his own consciously post-Joycean and post-Eliotic alembications. E. M. Forster is 'the best English novelist of this century'. Remembering that Mr. Spender has in the past felt bound to write about James (to whom so many commentators have paid attention without being, properly speaking, acquainted with him) we are not surprised to find that James suffers a number of mentions in *World Within World*. Speaking of Mr. Isaiah Berlin, Mr. Spender says: 'Human behaviour was for him a subject of fantastic inquiry into motives and actions, reminding me of Henry James's many-branched speculations over the characters in his novels'. Of his Aunt Mary he tells us: 'She hated any tender emotions with a thoroughly English intensity only understood by novelists like Trollope and Henry James'. In a phrase clearly reminiscent of H. G. Wells's notorious assault, he refers to 'the later manner' as resembling 'a steam-roller spinning out filigree'.

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There is no need to multiply illustrations. The point they enforce makes itself as unanswerably when one turns over the pages of *World Within World* as it did when one looked at a page here and there in *The Destructive Element,* the critical work in 'which', says Mr. Spender, 'I analysed the deep consciousness of destructive forces threatening our civilization, which was to be found in the work of Henry James, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and some more recent writers. . . .' How, then, comes the question, did Mr. Spender, with such disadvantages, achieve his confidence in himself as a poet, a critic, and an intellectual? Or how (to put it another way) did he achieve recognition as such, so that for years now he has been an established value, and a major British Council export?[1]

> 'There was a sense of fulfilment [he says] in meeting these people. I was accepted by writers whose names were still surrounded for me by a sacred glow'.

The answer, of course, must be partly a tribute to Mr. Spender's personality. More generally, it brings up in a very impressive way a theme that has been a great deal canvassed in these pages: the fact that the present age in this country is characterized by a literary world in which, whatever principles and criteria prevail, they are not the principles and criteria of literary criticism. Mr. Spender's account of his Oxford years, the most interesting part of his book, is significant in relation to the development of that phase of those conditions ('the literary world') which determined his own portentous success. It was the late 'twenties, and 'calling on Auden was a serious business'. 'For his Oxford contemporaries the most impressive thing about Auden was that, at such an early age, he was so conscious and confident a master of his situation'. Mr. Spender's view of Auden is still essentially undergraduate—but then so is that which one may expect to find any week in the *Times Literary Supplement* (to note which is to make a quintessential observation about the present state of English letters). 'Sometimes he gave the impression of playing an intellectual game with himself and with others, and this meant that in the long run he was rather isolated'. But his attitudes and intellectualities are reported with awe—and they did, in fact, we know, have a most effective influence.

> 'Such lectures by one young writer to another, with their mixture of sense and nonsense, fun and portentousness, malice and generosity compose a secret language among a circle. They are the witches' brew from which a literary movement is made'.

The Auden we are shown was intent on making a literary movement, and, conditions in the world of letters being what they were, we can see that he had formidable qualifications:

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[1]See the discussion, *The Progress of Poesy,* in *Scrutiny* Vol. XV, No. 4. A companion booklet to Mr. John Hayward's *Prose Literature since 1939* was written by Mr. Spender on Poetry, and is published for, and circulated by, the British Council.

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'He thought that the literary scene in general offered an empty stage. "Evidently they are waiting for Someone," he said with an air that he would soon take the centre of it. However, he did not think of himself as the only writer of the future. He had the strongest sense of looking for colleagues and disciples, not just in poetry but in all the arts. He looked at a still life on the wall and said: "He will be The Painter". This was by Robert Medley. His friend Isherwood was to be The Novelist. Chalmers was another of the Gang. Cecil Day Lewis was a colleague. A group of emergent artists existed in his mind, like a cabinet in the mind of a party leader'.

. . . . . .

'I took to showing Auden my poems. . . . After I had known him six weeks he must have approved of as many of my lines. Therefore it was rather surprising to discover that he considered me a member of "the Gang". Once I told him I wondered whether I ought to write prose, and he answered: "You must write nothing but poetry, we do not want to lose you for poetry". This remark produced in me a choking moment of hope mingled with despair, in which I cried: "But do you really think I am any good?" "Of course," he replied frigidly. "But why?" "Because you are so infinitely capable of being humiliated. Art is born of humiliation", he added in his icy voice—and left me wondering when *he* could feel humiliated'.

The conditions were even more favourable than Auden could have known. So far as literary fashions were concerned, it was the right moment. Eliot had done the work; the time was ripe for Modern Poetry to be 'in'; the advantage was reaped by the Gang. Dons at Cambridge who had resisted Eliot till they were beginning to feel that resistance was possible no longer jumped with relief at Auden's *Poems*, and one heard of margins annotated black. Auden began to appear on Tripos papers. What! not able to appreciate Eliot?—*His* admirers, it was intimated, were sadly in the lag: Auden had superseded him. Here was Modern Poetry of a difficult intellectuality, the difficulty of which, all the same, was hearty and encouraging, and did not demand of the reader that he should question in any radical way his everyday attitudes. It proposed instead the easy acceptance of a guaranteed rightness. For among the favourable conditions, we have to note that the Slump had happened and the days of Public School Marxising and Fellow-travelling had begun. And

'If Auden is the satirist of this poetical renascence, Spender is its lyric poet. In his work the experimentalism of the last two decades is beginning to find its reward. . . . Technically, these poems appear to mark a definite step forward in English poetry'.

Who, one wonders painfully, wrote that blurb to Stephen Spender's *Poems*, published by Faber & Faber? One knows, at

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any rate, who must have passed it. And Faber & Faber were publishers also, it is in place to note, of *The Criterion*. The movement that commanded the reviewing in *The Criterion* and the *New Statesman and Nation* would command the effective voice of contemporary criticism. But Anglo-Catholicism, Royalism, Classicism on the one hand, and, on the other, Shaw, Wells, Russell, Joad?—not a possible consolidation? A brief survey of the review pages of both organs will show that differences of philosophy and ethos were easily transcended; in a short while the new movement ('the Gang') had both the Left-inclined weekly and the Right-inclined quarterly unambiguously at its service.

The processes of mass-civilization that, by 1930, had so drastically reduced the number of critical organs and thus virtually abrogated the standards of criticism (for standards of criticism can have their effective existence only in an educated public that can make itself felt—as none can if there are not a considerable number of reviews, maintaining a large corps of intelligent and disinterested critics)—these reductive processes need not be discussed here. (Consider how different from what we have to contemplate now was that past state of affairs which we can deduce from R. G. Cox's article in the present issue of *Scrutiny*.) But it may still be wondered that there should have been, apparently, so little sense of what was happening, no protest, no note of scandal; certainly no resistance in places where one might have expected to find it. Can, for instance, so distinguished an intellectual as the Editor of *The Criterion*, assisting at the stultification of his work as poet and critic, have been as unaware as all that? Was it unawareness, or a sense that resistance was vain, and acquiescence a natural and inevitable course? In such a state of things the distinction is not a sharp one.

And about the 'state of things' it has to be said further at this point that, in the literary world, there was already an established tradition of coterie-power, and of coterie-power as a dazzling, creditable and proper thing. It was a tradition that, in ways more and less subtle, tended to countenance the intrusion of social and personal values into the field of criticism. In fact, not only conscience, but consciousness, in these matters had been gravely weakened. For an editor to attempt, in his review, to vindicate the function of criticism would have been to deserve the odium due to a gratuitous and most offensive moral heroism.

It is here that a consideration of the second book given at the head of this review becomes immediately relevant. Keynes, as Mr. Harrod shows us, had a major share in the formation of 'Bloomsbury', belonged to it throughout his life, and was a main source of its strength. In fact, Mr. Harrod shows us a Keynes who was the most formidable promoter of the coterie-spirit that modern England has known. To say this of Keynes is to pay tribute to the great gifts that made him formidable. These are not in question—his gifts as economist, logician and financial speculator. But Mr. Harrod credits him also with an all-round distinction; with gifts

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that qualified him to be a shaping and determining influence in the field of the humanities, and to be trusted, as a supreme intelligence, judging confidently and authoritatively, with the responsibilities of an enormously powerful patron. In this Mr. Harrod pays an unconscious and revealing tribute to the power of the coterie-influence, to which, as he tells us in his Preface, he enjoyed an early exposure:

> 'By good luck . . . I was brought into touch with a number of members of the "Bloomsbury" circle when I was a young man in the 'twenties. They made a sharp and indelible impression on my mind'.

He is—and in the very arts he practises in his book—an artless and admirable witness to what 'Bloomsbury' essentially was. He tells us, for instance (and it is an interesting minor contribution to English cultural history), that Lytton Strachey went before going to Cambridge to Liverpool University, drawn by the presence of Sir Walter Raleigh,[2]

> 'whose influence was important. It is pleasant to think that Raleigh's beautiful dry humour was not lost upon Strachey. Raleigh was in the van of a shift of critical values' [he asserted, we recall, Shakespeare's moral neutrality]. 'Cultivated persons of the late-Victorian period were no doubt well-read in our earlier masterpieces, but they were inclined to be over-zealous in their admiration of the Victorian pontiffs. . . .'

—It is plain that Raleigh's notion of Style, too, was not lost upon Strachey.

But the point to be made is that Keynes's distinction was confined to the field in which he was a professional. Where he was an amateur, though he took with him his characteristic high confidence, he was a mere amateur; as critic, man of taste and humanist he reflected the taste, idiom and assumptions of the very inferior coterie-milieu to which he belonged.

> 'And they gained, too, from his resources of knowledge and worldly contact. He was their main pillar of strength, their financial adviser, their patron. He was always ready to help, in one way or another, to promote their material interests'.

That so distinguished and influential a man should have been formed by such a milieu, and should have used his power and his prestige to confirm its dominance and propagate its ethos, is a fact of some historical importance in relation to the matters discussed in the first part of this review.

We can see it to have been a significant moment in the history,

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[2]Raleigh's significance was discussed by Q. D. Leavis in *Scrutiny* Vol. XII, No. 1 under the title *'The Discipline of Letters'*: a *Sociological Note.*

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not only of Cambridge, but of modern English culture, when, at the turn of the century, at the time of Keynes's going-up to King's from Eton, the coterie had its start, and the character of the milieu began to define itself. It might be asked why the coterie should have been so inferior. Without offering to explain in any ultimate sense, one may say something about the nature and conditions of the inferiority. The group of young men, mainly King's and Trinity, that Mr. Harrod describes, a group having in its connexion with the famous 'Society' intimate contacts at more senior levels, and a continuity with an illustrious intellectual tradition, obviously contained some real distinction as well as a good deal of academic—and academic-social—brilliance. But there is something about the constitutive ethos of the milieu that the intellectual distinction and the continuity from the past make the more ominous. We have it here, in Keynes's attitude to a representative great Cambridge man of the immediate past (the letter is dated 1906):

> 'Have you read Sidgwick's Life? Very interesting and depressing. . . . He never did anything but wonder whether Christianity was true and prove that it wasn't and hope that it was. . . .
>
> I wonder what he would have thought of us; and I wonder what we think of him. And then his conscience—incredible. There is no doubt about his moral goodness. And yet it is all so dreadfully depressing—no intimacy, no clear-cut boldness'.

We can guess well enough what Sidgwick would have thought of Lytton Strachey. And an *élite* of young Cambridge minds that could find the ethos of Lytton Strachey more congenial than that of Henry Sidgwick was certainly a significantly new thing. But of course the name to be set over against Sidgwick's is that of G. E. Moore (the following was also written in 1906):

> 'It is *impossible* to exaggerate the wonder and *originality* of Moore; people are already beginning to talk as if he were only a kind of logic-chopping eclectic. Oh why can't they see!
>
> How amazing to think that we and only we know the rudiments of a true theory of ethic; for nothing can be more certain than that the broad outline is true. . . . I even begin to agree with Moore about Sidgwick—that he was a wicked edifactious person'.

That Moore was, in his very limited way, a disinterested mind and innocent spirit made him the more irresistibly the very sanction they needed. 'The supreme values of life' writes Mr. Harrod, summarizing Moore's teaching, 'were the states of consciousness involved in human relations and in the appreciation of beauty'. This congenial doctrine (Keynes himself in the late 'Memoir'[3] notes what it

[3] *Two Memoirs by J. M. Keynes*, reviewed in *Scrutiny* Vol. XVI, No. 3 under the title *Keynes, Lawrence and Cambridge*.

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left out) was enforced in an austere logic which lent itself to deployment in a kind of coterie-dialectic. Thus the apostles were able to take a fixed and complacent immaturity in themselves for something very different; to associate an inveterate triviality with a suggestion of intellectual distinction and moral idealism—with, in fact, a kind of unction.

Their devotion to their 'specific image of what is meant by the idea of the good life' was 'sustained, no doubt', says Mr. Harrod, 'by certain elements of unearned income'. The immediate point to be made is that it was sustained by other 'unearned elements;' by an unrecognized legacy of other than money-values (essentially unrecognized, as comes out in the attitude to Sidgwick). It is all in the natural course of things that a 'civilization' of this kind ('it was certainly a civilization', says Keynes in that late 'Memoir'), conscious of a high distinction of refinement, should run not only to thinness and 'brittleness' (Keynes's word for a characteristic kind of coterie-talk), but to pretentious cheapness and to something one can only call vulgarity (consider, in their different ways, Lytton Strachey and Rupert Brooke).

As for the 'elements of unearned income', they need not, we know, of themselves have involved the Bloomsbury idea of the good life. Quite different moral, intellectual and practical habits ('civilizations') have been sustained by 'elements of unearned income'. And a glance may be given here at Mrs. Keynes's recent very interesting account of Maynard's education.[4] When he went to Eton, it was arranged, she tells us, that he should be supplied with white ties by the gross, so that he should be able to wear a new one every day, and when he was elected to College Pop, an order was placed with a local florist to deliver daily a fresh button-hole. A small matter, perhaps, but highly significant. It tells us a great deal about one aspect, at least, of what may be called his ethical education. The significance becomes the more apparent when we recall that Mrs. Keynes's father was the minister of the Bunyan chapel (and the descent on the other side was in the same religious tradition). With such a background, an education in the belief that one belongs to a highly privileged oligarchy, and has a natural right to the best of everything ('best' being interpreted as it is in Vanity Fair), inevitably tended to produce in Keynes the result that we actually see.

Explaining why Keynes devoted his genius to financial speculation, and 'went deeply in' ('on a narrow margin of cover'), Mr. Harrod tells us:

> 'He was determined not to relapse into salaried drudgery. He must be financially independent. He felt that he had that in him which would justify such independence. He had many things to tell the nation. And he wanted a sufficiency. He must be able to take stalls at the Russian ballet whenever he wished—

[4] *Gathering up the Threads*, by Florence Ada Keynes (Heffer, 12/6).

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and entertain the dancers, if that struck his fancy. He must be able to buy his friends' pictures—and pay them handsomely. These other dealers in money merely squandered their earnings on banal conventional luxuries. He must use his brains to put some of their money into his pocket, where it would fructify not only financially, but in supporting the people who really mattered, and in giving his own powers scope'.

The rejected 'salaried drudgery' was university teaching. Ah! but with the harvest of speculation he supported the arts, bought his friends' pictures, and bought other pictures too—with great acuteness, for (though Mr. Harrod reports the suspicion that he 'was never deeply moved by visual art') he left what turned out to be an extremely valuable private collection. And here what is to-day widely known as the Puritanic note has to be struck (a note of simple matter-of-fact moral observation to the minister of the Bunyan chapel). It regards an inevitable relation between the use for 'good' of the resources so amassed and the spirit of the amassing, the conception of the good life that encouraged it and throve on it.

'This exclusive Cambridge circle' writes Mr. R. H. S. Crossman, reviewing the book in the *Universities Quarterly* for May, 'gave him the poise of an intellectual oligarch, who could afford to be condemned as inconsistent and irresponsible by the vulgar, so long as his peers recognized that he was acting according to their esoteric code'. That is an admirable way of describing Keynes's peculiar formidableness as a promoter of the coterie-spirit. Even in the field of economics, where Keynes's relevant authority and his informed concern for standards are unquestioned, this spirit had, as Mr. Harrod recognizes, some unfortunate consequences. 'The formation of a coterie', Mr. Harrod ventures, 'may be valuable to sustain the courage of those whose work is in the realm of the imagination. But' he adds, 'Keynes may have tended to apply a helpful expedient in a sphere where it was inappropriate'. The evidence that Mr. Harrod gives is of a spirit that has to be resisted as mischievous anywhere; that it should have got even into the sphere where Keynes was a specialist has a sinister significance for the present inquiry: ' "But there isn't anyone else", they said' Mr. Harrod intimates, deferentially, that this conviction was ill-founded, and worked harm for economics.

'Really, you know, there isn't anyone else:' a good deal earlier in the book he has reported this as the note of 'Bloomsbury' ('outsiders were neglected'). How could something of that spirit, and of the stultifying confusion of values that, at best, it must involve, *not* manifest itself in the patronage and the influence, the use of financial resources for 'good', made possible by Keynes's addiction to speculation?

'He maintained' says Mr. Harrod of the (then) Bursar of King's, 'his interest in the quest for choice spirits in each new generation, for young men of intellect and sensibility who would carry on the traditions of his own undergraduate days . . . and he gave them an

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entrée into Bloomsbury'. Though we are left in no doubt that the recruitment referred to here is not to be understood as having been merely of economists, we are not forbidden to suppose that it may have entailed academic status: in this region Mr. Harrod sees no need to insist on distinctions, and the completeness with which he assumes that the criteria of 'Bloomsbury' are the unquestioned criteria of 'intellect and sensibility' reflects the completeness of the identification he found in the milieu on which Keynes conferred such power and influence. (If only one might quote—but no! one mustn't—Mr. Harrod's account of his own introduction at Keynes's college! but there is much amusing and eloquent evidence of that kind in the book).

To revert now to the questions provoked by the consideration of Mr. Spender's book: How could there be such an absence of protest, of apparent resistance and sense of scandal, when the Fellow-travellers of the Poetical Renascence, in the early 'thirties, took possession of the organs of criticism? How could the illustriously edited *Criterion* lend itself so easily (it would appear) and so incongruously?

Considering these questions we can see what there is to be said with immediate relevance about Keynes's place in history. It is not (at least, it is not there the stress falls at the moment) that he promoted, in the cultural realm, the 'Bloomsbury' idea of the good life, or the ethos of any particular milieu, but that he promoted in enormously influential ways the habit of substituting the social-personal values for the relevant ones. If, on the one hand, belonging to a highly dominant intellectual and social milieu, you use your power and prestige to slight the essential intellectual standards and to discredit the notion of critical conscience, and, on the other, to give respectability and sanction to the natural human weakness for replacing the real standards by personal and coterie considerations, then you may be fairly credited with having helped substantially to bring about the state of things revealed in Mr. Spender's autobiography. And it has to be remembered that the literary-intellectual 'world' was a small one, and that the parts of it not dominated from the Axis, Eton-King's-Bloomsbury-and the relevant weekly, couldn't matter much.

To-day the triumph of the social-personal (or 'club', we may now call it) principle is complete. The club is not narrowly exclusive, but you must belong (and keep the rules) if you are to be recognized to exist. And if the club is not narrowly exclusive, the system of relations by which it controls the organs and institutions through which the currency-values are established and circulated is comprehensive and complete. The completeness with which the notions of criticism, critical principle and critical standard have been superseded was demonstrated when, a year or so ago, a note was printed in this journal pointing out the lack of obvious suitability in the judges for the Festival of Britain Poetry Prizes: there was genuine scandalized indignation in many quarters, including some that couldn't be thought of as being anything but disinterested. *That*

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kind of thing is inexcusable and unpardonable.

Yet now the prizes have been awarded, we find as respectable a newspaper as the *Manchester Guardian* reporting discouragement and dismay, and asking whether, with such a lack of obvious felicity in the appointment of judges, awards more calculated to promote life in English poetry could have been expected. But the question that should be asked is whether, when things have got into the state in which they are now, the kind of encouragement of the arts from which Keynes hoped so much, that represented by the Arts Council, can really, in sum, do anything but encourage and strengthen the system referred to above—the system that, in literature at any rate, makes the restoring of the critical function (and so the recovery of a public) impossible.

F. R. LEAVIS.

HISTORY AND CRITICISM IN THE HOME UNIVERSITY

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE, by C. V. Wedgwood. Home University Library Series (Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 5/-).

A brief survey of seventeenth century literature in a popular series such as this was an opportunity to bring to the notice of a wider audience of students and general readers the remarkable interest and enthusiasm this literature has commanded during the last thirty years, to make available the results of something like a revolution in taste, and to exemplify the new critical principles and methods which have accompanied it. In the present volume it cannot be said that this opportunity has been taken. The author starts, it would appear, with many advantages: as a biographer and historian of the period she has a comprehensive sense of the general background and an unusual knowledge of the details of the political, religious and social life of the time as revealed in pamphlets, memoirs, letters and journals. To this she has added wide reading of the major and minor literature in prose and verse. What is lacking, unfortunately, is the one thing needful—the critic's power to distinguish sharply between the living and the dead and to enforce his judgments by convincing analysis.

To substantiate this charge we may consider the chapter on Metaphysical poetry, which in the circumstances provides an obvious test. The account of Donne is reasonable, though it stresses rather too much the eccentric personality and does not do justice to the command of verse: there is no reference, for example, to his dramatic use of the rhythms of speech and his expressive handling of stanza forms. On the Metaphysical manner as a whole Miss

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Wedgwood shows little sign of having assimilated the insights of Professor Grierson and Mr. Eliot. A desire to avoid current catch-phrases about 'unified sensibility', 'felt thought', and the rest may be understandable, but it is only justified if there is an individual apprehension of the facts of style and sensibility these phrases were invented to describe, and that is lacking here. Miss Wedgwood seems more at home with the lighter Metaphysical poets, on whose 'undertones of self-mockery' she has a sensible paragraph, than with the central line of Donne, King, Lord Herbert, Herbert and Marvell. She even commits herself to the judgment, most inadequately substantiated, that 'by far the greatest of the metaphysical poets after Donne' was Crashaw, and seems unaware that a considerable consensus of opinion would put Herbert or Marvell a long way before him. The comment on Herbert is shockingly inadequate: he gets a bare page, hardly more than Cleveland, and the impression is given that his work shows nothing but serenity. No notion is given to the enquiring student of the poet of *The Pilgrimage,* the *Affliction* poems, *Dialogue, Longing, The Collar* or the second *Employment.* King's *Exequy* gets due notice, but there is no mention of Lord Herbert's *Ode,* and the comment on Marvell gives no hint of the presence of the Metaphysical strain in his work at all. But then, Miss Wedgwood thinks that Cowley and Suckling 'very nearly approach to greatness', and that Carew may be grouped with Fanshawe as continuing 'the sweet mannered Italian fashion attenuated . . . to mere arabesques of prettiness, yet saved from banality by a certain freshness of touch, a certain aristocracy of style'. That 'aristocracy of style' deserves more notice and more analysis than it gets here. The suggestion that the second quarter of the seventeenth century was unusually prolific in small talents ignores a possible alternative explanation, that the poetic tradition was unusually healthy and especially favourable to the full development of minor talent, which existed in the usual quantity. One might have expected a historian to have something useful to contribute on the social and cultural factors behind this.

Whether it is a matter of the cobbler sticking to his last that leads Miss Wedgwood to lay somewhat exaggerated stress on the Caroline period it is rather difficult to say: perhaps it is merely the effect of an arrangement that separates Donne from Jacobean poetry in order to make him the introduction to the Cavaliers Jacobean poetry then becomes a somewhat dull list—Drayton Fulke Greville, the Fletchers, Campion, Drummond, apart from Ben Jonson. Drummond is rather over-praised, Campion's attractive mellifluousness earns the excessive description 'transcendent' (Miss Wedgwood frequently commends 'the sensitive ear' in the conventional use of the term, treating music in isolation from meaning). Ben Jonson appears somewhat caricatured as 'lord of misrule, author in chief, with his finger in every pie, huge, loud-mouthed, bragging Ben'. In the account of his drama we miss a due recognition of his moral seriousness and sanity (*Sejanus* and *Catiline* are dismissed as lacking 'tragic fire'): in that of his lyric

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poetry we look in vain for a sense of the 'tough reasonableness' which was Jonson's kind of wit or the essentially civilized tone which was the real basis of his classicism.

As with the poets, so with the Jacobean dramatists, there is far too little discrimination. Miss Wedgwood, while admitting that *The Maid's Tragedy* is inferior as poetry, says that 'the predicament of Evadne . . . is wonderfully conveyed'. Since it is necessarily conveyed through that poetry of 'cut and slightly withered flowers stuck into sand', so admirably characterized by Mr. Eliot, how can this be so? Fletcher, Massinger and Ford are all over-rated—we are told that 'Ford alone can touch the stops of love and anguish in the Shakespearean manner'—and in a survey which gives half a paragraph to *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the name of Tourneur is not so much as mentioned. Miss Wedgwood seems to take the general attitude that apart from the traditionally established great names any man's preferences are as good as another's: the persistence of false ascriptions (in particular one to Rochester of a poem by Quarles) is regarded as 'an eloquent comment on the essentially subjective nature of nearly all criticism'.

On Milton this book follows safe conservative lines with very little particular quotation. It is difficult to see why the *Nativity* Ode is described as his 'possibly least successful poem', or, without examples, to gather exactly what is meant by the statement 'The visual images created by the blind poet of the last poems have an unhindered clarity of focus'. The comparison of a passage from *Il Penseroso* with one from *Paradise Regained* may not seem to all readers an entirely convincing example of increased power in every respect. There is no attempt to meet such criticisms as have become familiar since Mr. Middleton Murry wrote *The Problem of Style*: 'only on narrow and trivial criteria of judgment' declares Miss Wedgwood roundly, 'can he be denied his place as one of the greatest poets of'—not this country but—'the world'. The treatment of the Restoration poets is on the whole just, but it is doubtful whether 'venomous' is the right word to apply to Dryden's satire at any time.

It must be said that the chapters on prose are much more satisfactory than those on poetry and drama, especially that on the practical prose of the Civil War period. This, no doubt, is because the subject offers more opportunity for the relevant employment of historical knowledge and interests. There are also some useful remarks in the introduction and elsewhere on the development of the language.

The bibliography is oddly erratic. The reader will not gather that Mr. Eliot has ever written a line on Jacobean drama or Metaphysical poetry or Milton: he appears only under Dryden. There is no specific direction to Sir Herbert Grierson's introductory essay to his Metaphysical anthology, and no mention of Mr. Leavis's *Revaluation* or of Miss Bradbrook's *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*.

With all its width of reference and its air of easy competence

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this book cannot be considered satisfactory for its purpose. In healthier cultural epochs it is probable that things were different, but to-day the fluent expression of the opinions of an average cultivated reader, whatever specialist knowledge may be super-added, is just not sufficient for a task of this kind. One cannot help wondering how the academic historians would have received a work in this series on a historical subject by a writer who was primarily a literary critic.

R. G. Cox.

THE ARNOLDIAN FUNCTION IN AMERICAN CRITICISM

THE LIBERAL IMAGINATION, by Lionel Trilling (Secker and Warburg, 15/-).

Only one of the essays collected in *The Liberal Imagination* has appeared previously in this country, but all of them were published in America during the last decade, the period, that is, which followed directly upon the first edition of Mr. Trilling's authoritative biography of Matthew Arnold. These facts immediately suggest that the influence of Arnold was bound to be strong in Mr. Trilling's future essays in criticism, and so it turned out. Of those essays, Mr. Trilling has chosen sixteen to be included in this book, and they cover a very wide area under the headings 'writers and writing', 'art and psychology', and 'politics and culture' (this last group, as is proper, might have been incorporated into the first). Now that they have been collected, however, it has become remarkably apparent that Arnold exerted the most fertilizing kind of influence on his biographer, the kind that results in what can best be called a kinship, a deep affinity. And the fact that the depth of Arnold's impress only now becomes clear is a measure of how fully and creatively Mr. Trilling has responded to the mind of his great predecessor. For the thing to remember about Arnold is that his real importance lay in the large purpose which coursed through the whole of his work, expressing itself in terms of a committed responsiveness to the problems of his age. So that a properly Arnoldian critic is one who places himself in a certain relation to his immediate cultural environment and maintains his position of vigilance through the years. This relation I want to define and estimate, for *it* is what defines and estimates the worth of Mr. Trilling's book.

The Liberal Imagination, because of its title and still more because of the preface which asserts Mr. Trilling's intention of supplying American liberals with a critique from the inside, invites discussion as a political dissertation in disguise. Some reviewers, particularly in America, have indeed treated it as such. It is there-

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fore unfortunately necessary to point out that this is not a book on liberalism;[1] it is a collection of critical essays. Part of the function of criticism is of course to clear the air. Musty evaluations have their source in false notions and thin attitudes which begin by preventing intelligent reading and—as Mr. Trilling all too desperately knows and as Arnold knew before him—end by fashioning a whole civilization in their own meagre image. If Mr. Trilling is right when he says that 'in the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition' (p. ix), then we can take it for granted that his unifying interest in the ideas of that tradition, especially as they relate to the making and the reading of literature, means very simply an informing concern with American culture. This concern is what finally gives to the book its enormous pertinence to the major problems of contemporary America, and precisely for that reason, we owe it to Mr. Trilling not to misunderstand its place in his work. His critique of the liberal imagination is not systematic; it does not have even the sketchy systematization of Mr. Eliot's attack in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. Mr. Eliot believes that the doctrines of liberalism amount to no more than a set of negatives; Mr. Trilling believes—and this is central—that liberalism has a native 'primal' strength to maintain it. Not the doctrines of liberalism, then, but the attitudes of liberals are under fire here. For Mr. Trilling's critique grows out of an awareness that the tradition is less in danger of turning into a name for an elaborate series of negatives than of becoming the cloak and defence of vicious positives inimical to its own interest. And to save itself, liberalism must first of all grow conscious of its deeper meanings; it needs, in short, to become critical. So that the much-quoted preface to these essays cannot be said to state their theme, but rather to set the stage.

Because Mr. Trilling has constant reference to the particularities of the scene, we think of him as Arnoldian. But it is because his sense of the details is so penetrating, and his methods of dealing

[1]It is perhaps in place to remind the British reader that American liberalism has little in common with the political sentiments professed by Lord Samuel. Mr. Trilling means the loose confederacy of ideas which descend largely from Mill. But in his use of the term it has no strict reference to any political party, though it would be untrue to say that the New Deal, for example, was not more consciously liberal and progressive than the Old Guard Republicans. One of Mr. Trilling's main points is that there is no living conservative tradition of ideas in America, and that the wide attitudes of liberalism, particularly those which embody its vicious potentialities, have so permeated American culture that they crop up even in the most unlikely quarters. This contention—that liberalism is the sole intellectual tradition in the United States—aroused a great deal of discussion among the American reviewers, but the British reader will not be so easily misled by it if he keeps the above points in mind.

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with them directly through the discussion of literature so subtle, that he commands attention as the most significant American critic now writing. There is, incidentally, some point in calling Mr. Trilling's book significant; one would hardly be tempted to use the word of most contemporary American criticism. Textual analysis and the 'elucidation of complex structure' have by now routed the old literary historians out of the academy; the New Criticism is all but enshrined as a New Academicism with a sterility that begins to make Dryasdust look in retrospect rather like an oasis. Mr. Trilling has been pretty much alone among American critics in reminding us that a return to the text must be followed by a fresh departure from the text if criticism is to come alive. And we all know where the departure leads—into society, and politics, and history. That the poet has the power to modify the cultural climate and to be effective in the solution of problems was an idea which the socially-conscious 'thirties contributed to American criticism. As a general proposition this is forceful enough, but its worth, after all, depends on further definition, and here the early Marxists fell into the usual traps of the dogmatic thinker. They did great damage to their case for the social bearings of literature by resting with an entirely inadequate notion of what constitutes a problem and an even faultier understanding of what the effectiveness of art is likely to consist in. Mr. Trilling's essays do much to clarify these difficulties, and they go a long way toward deepening the possibilities of historical method in criticism. He brings together scholarship commensurate with that of the old literary historians, an analytic subtlety comparable to Brooks', and a sense of the all-important interplay between literature and society that successfully counters the stigmatized Marxist approach. It will perhaps be seen a bit more clearly, then, why he has so solid a claim to the Arnoldian title in the American context.

Observe, for example, how the two essays on Freud ('Freud and Literature' and 'Art and Neurosis') together suggest that the misunderstanding by literary critics of a system of thought does not remain in monographs, but spreads its tentacles into many departments of life. 'Freud and Literaure' gives us a masterly summation of the limitations of Freud with respect to literature, and goes on to show in the first place that the usefulness of Freudian psychology is not to be found in such confining literal applications as the Ernest Jone sstudy of *Hamlet,* nor even in such modest attempts as Franz Alexander's interpretation of *Henry IV*. Instead, what must be pondered is the philosopher whose sense of the human mind was of an organism to which the making of poetry was a *natural* activity, and whose principles 'are so clearly in the line of the classic tragic realism' (p. 57). This is a Freud whose views do not 'narrow and simplify the human world for the artist but on the contrary open and complicate it' (p. 57) In other words, this is a Freud who creates the climate for great literature. The other Freud, the one who has been invoked to support the belief that neurosis is the cause of genius, is imaginary, and Mr. Trilling in 'Art and

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Neurosis' supplies us with a most cogent refutation of that alarmingly current view, as well as a much more congenial representation of what Freud actually had to say on the matter. In itself the essay is a demonstration of the right kind of use to which Freud can be put by a literary critic. Mr. Trilling's characteristic method can also be seen at work in one of the largely theoretical pieces in the book, the one called 'The Meaning of a Literary Idea'. 'Since liberal democracy inevitably generates a body of ideas, it must necessarily occur to us to ask why it is that these particular ideas have not infused with force and cogency the literature that embodies them' (p. 301). The answer to this question is not to be found 'in the weakness of the liberal democratic ideas in themselves'. We must look for it, says Mr. Trilling, 'in the kind of relationship which we, or the writers who represent us, maintain toward the ideas we claim as ours, and in our habit of conceiving the nature of ideas in general' (p. 302). And in the essay, which beautifully puts its finger on the weakness of Wolfe, O'Neill, and Dos Passos as a radical failure of mind, Mr. Trilling gives ample evidence that the shallow attitude he is exposing is by no means confined to the philistine population, but has permeated the academic atmosphere as well.

But the method is in action perhaps to clearest advantage in the piece dealing with Parrington and Dreiser ('Reality in America'). Dreiser was celebrated while James and Hawthorne were being rejected, this in the name of 'liberal' assumptions—in the name of that tradition of 'realism' which found its major defence in Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*. The disposal of Parrington was long overdue, and Mr. Trilling does an effective job mainly by a demonstration that Parrington's ideas are derived from the more debilitating notions latent in liberal thinking. As for Dreiser, who was caught up completely by the tradition and owed fame and power to his almost symbolic status as exponent and representative of what was best in American culture—Mr. Trilling carries out a devastating analysis of his work in the latter part of the essay. Dreiser's stupidity and his stylistic clumsiness are exposed for what they are—not reflections of the hard, jagged world of 'reality' but incompetence and lack of intelligence; and the celebration of him as a novelist is exposed for what *it* represents—not liberal and democratic sentiment, but a total misconception as to what liberal and democratic sentiment really mean. All of which leaves us with the renewed perception that to relax the critical sense leads to matters much more dangerous than wrong judgments of novelists; it leads pretty directly to the misvaluation of the very stuff of politics and culture.

Along with this intense understanding of what America is goes a parallel concern for what its possibilities are. Mr. Trilling knows his country, but he knows 'the mind of Europe' too, and he is like nothing so much as a latter-day Henry James of criticism who sees that the future of our world depends upon the infusion of

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something European into the American pattern. For James the 'something' amounted to what can loosely be called sensibility or 'civilization', and the American pattern meant innocence combined with great material strength. Well, both cultures have changed somewhat since James' day, and if the marriage is still to take place, it will have to base itself on slightly altered mutual attractions. Whatever the precise nature of the changes which have taken place may be, the fact is that the situation in America has grown in complexity at highly strategic points, while the position of England with respect to America has itself shifted considerably in the last thirty-five years. There are many new problems to be dealt with, and the old ones have taken on deeper colourings and added difficulties. In short what America needs is no longer the simple consciousness of the life of the spirit, and it seems to me that Mr. Trilling tells us, by dramatic enactment and explicit suggestion, something about the new terms of the marriage James envisaged.

At the very beginning, in the piece on 'Reality in America', we come across a basic formulation which crops us again and again in Mr. Trilling's thinking—that there is a metaphysics behind the assertions of 'liberal' criticism. It is an Idea of reality, and Mr. Trilling is quick to point out that there exists an opposition in Parrington's scheme of things—as, indeed, in the traditional American feelings on the subject—between the 'reality' he admires and ideas or mind (Hawthorne, for example, dealt with 'shadows' according to Parrington, and Melville was 'idealist' or unconcerned with the solid realities of life: pp. 9-10). No doubt this is the metaphysic of industrialism, but that is beside the point. For Mr. Trilling's purposes, the important point to make is that this assumption about the nature of reality has its repercussions. We see it at work in the American view of such things as the relation of ideas to literature, the importance of class and manners to the novelist, the meaning of 'social significance', and a host of other matters which lie at 'the bloody crossroads where politics and literature meet'. How obfuscating such attitudes are becomes especially noticeable when we recall that the diversity and variety which naturally result from a rigid class structure and which provide the novelist with a thick vein of ore, are and always have been lacking in America.[2] Consequently, the disgust of 'a vulgar and facile progressivism' at, say, class-thinking prevents the recognition of how fertile a field there is for the novel in the new groupings and divisions which America seems to have developed since James' day—a system based on conflicting ideologies.[3] This is a system analogous to class in its possibilities for literary exploitation, and

[2]Mr. Trilling (p. 212 *f.*) aptly quotes the famous passage from James' life of Hawthorne 'in which James enumerates the things which are lacking to give the American novel the thick social texture of the English novel'. The catalogue includes court, aristocracy, palaces, parsonages, thatched cottages, cathedrals, and public schools.

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yet withal indigenously American. Mr. Trilling, largely in order to make these recognitions possible, wants, quite frankly, to clear away the hostility to class-thinking in the American consciousness, and, to expedite matters further, he wants to banish the suspiciousness of the presence of ideas themselves in a work of art.[4] There are hints here, it will be seen, at a new form of influence which England can have on American culture.

I think these considerations will explain what to many British readers may perhaps seem strange and exaggerated overtures to the class basis of the English novel (in 'Manners, Morals, and the Novel' and 'Art and Fortune'). And it certainly explains Mr. Trilling's somewhat disproportionate interest in F. Scott Fitzgerald, the writer who pre-eminently saw the line which the American novel, in Mr. Trilling's view, will have to take. Fitzgerald caught up something fundamental in the American spirit, and in his awed remark that 'the really rich are different from us', Mr. Trilling hears a note of the kind of perception no native American novelist has been able to make live in the practice of his art. Furthermore, Fitzgerald was in the tradition of 'moral realism' (a concept Mr. Trilling is fond of pitting against the Parrington sense of realism), and his failure to achieve anything finally significant is all the more disconcerting because he was a step in the right direction, that direction which leads away, far away, from Theodore Dreiser. He was, then, searching for the sort of variety, within the American framework, which was easily available to the nineteenth century British novelist. A precise sense of the area in which the potential analogies lay was not given to him. Mr. Trilling's suggestions that they are to be found, for example, in the ideological divisions of American life are not as fully developed as we might have hoped, but they have the unique merit of offering a new approach to the Jamesian problem.

I hope I haven't done Mr. Trilling the disservice of making it sound as if he had a roundly formulated Programme For Our Time, or that his book has a more pressing unity than he wishes it to have. Space does not permit extended discussion of some of the

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[3]The distinction between ideas and ideologies which Mr. Trilling makes should be kept in mind at this point. 'Ideology is not acquired by thought but by breathing the haunted air. The life in ideology, from which none of us can wholly escape, is a strange submerged life of habit and semi-habit in which to ideas we attach strong passions but no very clear awareness of the concrete reality of their consequences' (pp. 275-6).

[4]I have been tying several essays ('Reality in America', 'Art and Fortune', 'Manners, Morals and the Novel', 'The Princess Casamassima', most notably) together for reasons which should become clear below. It must be repeated that I am not at all trying to give the impression that Mr. Trilling has a 'system', But several of his ideas flow together in what seems to me a highly suggestive way.

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other interesting essays in the book, but those on 'The Kinsey Report' (probably the most remarkable review of a statistical report ever written), 'Huckleberry Finn', and 'The Sense of the Past' (a piece which says some very penetrating things about the study of literature and the cultivation of the historical sense), should at least be singled out for praise. His essay on Kipling, also, is a distinguished performance, and seems to me, by virtue of a lively awareness of how difficult it is to separate Kipling the straw-man of liberalism from the Kipling who is still interesting, the most valuable of the recent estimates we have had from both sides of the Atlantic. It says what has to be said about Kipling, with no embarrassed bows, and with a poise and reasonableness which are remarkable for an American critic. We are not accustomed to the kind of prose from American critics that British readers usually think of as 'civilized'; Americans have a reputation—no doubt justly—for a tone of ruggedness and fierceness and loud assertiveness. Perhaps for this reason the reviews in this country have been quick to acclaim Mr. Trilling for his 'goodness' and his 'generosity', not to mention his 'sweetness' and his 'gentleness' (the suggestion of gentility is of course suspiciously at work in that word). Mr. Trilling's judgments, however, are anything but gentle: the paragraphs on Parrington, Dreiser, Wolfe, O'Neill (like the Kipling essay as a whole) are no more or less gentle than the quick slash of a scalpel.

T. S. Eliot has remarked that if Arnold were alive to-day, he would have to do all his work over again. Of *The Liberal Imagination* and of its author, it is possible to feel that they are doing for America, at least, the work Arnold himself might have done.

NORMAN PODHORETZ.

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MR. ELIOT AND LAWRENCE

D. H. LAWRENCE AND HUMAN EXISTENCE by Father William Tiverton; Foreword by T. S. Eliot (Rockcliff, 12/6).
PORTRAIT OF A GENIUS, BUT . . . by Richard Aldington (Heinemann, 15/-).

I live in hopes that Lawrence's recognition is at last to come—to come after all in my life-time; I mean, his recognition for what I am convinced he is: the great creative genius of our age, and one of the greatest figures in English literature. By 'our age' I mean the climatic phase (so to speak) in which we still live at present,—for, though Lawrence died twenty years ago, he may properly be said, I think, to belong to that. My immediate excuse for this sanguine note is the Foreword contributed by Mr. T. S. Eliot to Fr. William Tiverton's book. Fr. Tiverton recommends Lawrence as a positively improving author for Christians, and Mr. Eliot says that his reason for contributing a preface is that he thinks the book 'a serious piece of criticism of Lawrence of a kind for which the time is now due'. (He adds that 'we need books about him by critics who know him only through his works').

If Mr. Eliot finds that the time for giving serious critical attention to Lawrence's writings is more due now than it was, say, twenty years ago (or even earlier), the only reason I can think of is that there has been a change in Mr. Eliot. For those of us who, all these years, have steadily contended that the time was due, and overdue, have always known Mr. Eliot as, in various ways, the reverse of an ally. He has lent all his weight and subtlety to the enemy—the enemy that has maligned and slighted and dismissed. In fact, we have had reason for seeing in him the essential opposition in person. So that when so significant and influential a voice suddenly becomes encouraging we may feel there has been a change worth attending to.

The history the more deserves pondering in that our time, in literature, may fairly be called the age of D. H. Lawrence and T. S. Eliot: the two, in creative pre-eminence, I think, though Lawrence appears to me so decidedly the greater genius, will be seen in retrospect to dominate the age together. True respect for genius is to take it seriously and appraise it critically, and it seems to me that Mr. Eliot's attitude towards Lawrence has a significance in respect of himself that, pondered, entails limiting and qualifying criticism of a kind for which the time is now very decidedly due. My business at the moment, of course, is rather with appraising the genius of Lawrence, but to that business, it should be plain, what I have said is immediately relevant. Moreover, history is history, and it is important that this particular history should not go unrecorded.

And indeed it is not yet the history of an outgrown past. For, though the Foreword to which I have referred recommends

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Lawrence for serious study, it perpetuates the misconceptions, misrepresentations and misdirections that have already, over so long a period, worked so much mischief. Not only does Mr. Eliot make no recantation; he shows himself to be still unemancipated from his disabling prejudices (for no one, I am convinced, who had been able to *read* what Lawrence wrote could have pronounced as Mr. Eliot does). If they are expressed now less offensively, they are the more insidious—and the more insidious because associated with a recommendatory approach. And to tackle them seems to me to be, at the present moment, very much the way to set about one's work, when faced with contending, as effectively as one can, for a just appreciation of Lawrence's genius.

Here, then, is Mr. Eliot in his preface to Fr. Tiverton's *D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence*:

> 'He was an impatient and impulsive man (or so I imagine him to have been; for, like the author of this book, I never knew him). He was a man of fitful and profound insights, rather than of ratiocinative powers; and therefore he was an impatient man; he expressed some of his insights in the form least likely to make them acceptable to most of his contemporaries, and sometimes in a form which almost wilfully encouraged misunderstanding. . . . Wrong he often was (I think) from ignorance, prejudice, or drawing the wrong conclusions in his conscious mind from the insights which came to him from below consciousness: it will take time to dissociate the superficial error from the fundamental truth. To me, also, he seems often to write very badly; but to be a writer who had to write often badly in order to write sometimes well. As for his religious attitude . . . we can now begin to see how much was ignorance, rather than hostility; for Lawrence was an ignorant man in the sense that he was unaware of how much he did not know'.

These observations in themselves are ill-calculated to remove the preconceptions and obtusenesses that have prevented Lawrence's work from being seen for what it is and have made the shameful history of misrepresentation and abuse possible; and it seems to me very much in place to relate them to those past judgments that Mr. Eliot has never shown regret for and in part now repeats.

Take, for example, that charge of ignorance. It is made twice in the passage quoted. The second time the formulation might seem to give it a special limited, almost esoteric, force that makes it, however grave as addressed to Mr. Eliot's and Fr. Tiverton's special religious connexion, not obviously, perhaps, exceptionable as itself an expression of prejudice and ignorance. But already in this Foreword, in the same paragraph in fact, the charge has been made in a general form: 'Wrong he often was (I think) from ignorance, prejudice.' The attendant suggestions—'a man of fitful and profound insights, rather than of ratiocinative powers', 'drawing the wrong conclusions in his conscious mind from the

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insights that came to him from below consciousness', 'a writer who had to write often badly in order to write sometimes well',—these attendant suggestions plainly give the charge of 'ignorance' an ordinarily unsophisticated and pejorative intention. What Mr. Eliot meant by such criticism in the past was fully explicit; and what has never been withdrawn, and is far from being unsaid now, must be recalled to be refuted. There is no way of getting Lawrence's genius recognized except by dealing with these fallacies and prejudices and misrepresentations.

In the *Cambridge Journal* for February a writer—and one not at all inclined to the corrective severity that seems to me called for—testifies: 'With one or two exceptions'—he mentions only myself—'critics since Lawrence's death have tended to follow the lead of Mr. Eliot in *After Strange Gods*'. Let me recall then some of the things that Mr. Eliot says in that book. I pick on some judgments and assertions that are immediately relevant to the charge of ignorance. 'The point is' we are told, 'that Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution. . . .' He suffered 'from a lack, not so much of information, as of the critical faculties which education should give, and an incapacity for what is ordinarily called thinking'. Again Mr. Eliot speaks of Lawrence's 'lack of intellectual and social training'. A reference to Lawrence's mother tells us, I'm afraid, what Mr. Eliot means by this 'lack of social training': he speaks of her 'vague hymn-singing pietism . . . which does not seem to have provided her with any firm principles by which to scrutinize the conduct of her sons'—Lawrence was working-class, in fact a miner's son; and therefore brought up in the midst of ignorance and uncouthness and spiritual barbarity and moral squalor, disinherited of all the humaner achievements of civilized living. We are to see him as an extreme case of the 'crippling effect upon men of letters of not having been brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition'.

It is when I come to these things in Mr. Eliot that I find myself saying: '*I* am a fellow-countryman of D. H. Lawrence'. Mr. Eliot is not—the fact that is in any case sufficiently obvious insists here upon recognition. For no educated Englishman of Mr. Eliot's generation and Mr. Eliot's intelligence, I am convinced, could so confidently have expressed such ignorance. And yet there is something familiar about the tone and manner: it is as if, not to the manner born, Mr. Eliot were showing himself to have been impressed by the aplomb with which Lord David Cecil intimates *his* sense of the disadvantages suffered by low-born writers such as Hardy and George Eliot—and D. H. Lawrence. (I well remember the *Spectator* article in which Lord David Cecil put *Mr.* Lawrence, recently dead, impeccably in his place).

To be born, with that genius, a miner's son at Eastwood in the eighteen-eighties—it is as if Destiny, having given him the genius, had arranged also that he should be enabled to develop it to the utmost and qualified to use it for the purposes for which it was

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meant. If he had not been born into the working-class he could not have known working-class life from the inside. As it was he enjoyed advantages that a writer middle-class born could not have had: the positive experience and a freedom both from illusions and from the debilitating sense of ignorance. On the other hand, gifted as he was, there was nothing to prevent his getting to know life at other social levels.

And the disadvantages, what were they? In education? It seems to me that he had a better education, one better calculated to develop his genius for its most fruitful use, than any other he could have got. That is what strikes one as one reads the admirable *Memoir of D. H. Lawrence* by E.T. I some years ago, in an article (*Scrutiny* VI, 3) referred to by Fr. Tiverton, discussed the extraordinarily active intellectual life enjoyed by that group of young people of which Lawrence was the centre, and pointed to the obvious fact that, though in all this the initiative and drive of Lawrence's genius must have counted enormously, the initiative and drive could neither have been what they were, nor could they have worked to such effect, if there hadn't been conditions other than personal genius, or 'the individual talent', favouring. To examine these conditions adequately would be to go into a large part of English social and cultural history.

It must be enough here to say that the religion of Lawrence's mother does not deserve the contempt with which Mr. Eliot dismisses it. The Chapel, in the Lawrence circle, was the centre of a strong social life, and the focus of a still persistent cultural tradition that had as its main drive the religious tradition of which Mr. Eliot is so contemptuous. To turn, as Lawrence did, the earnestness and moral seriousness of that tradition to the powering of a strenuous intellectual inquiringness was all in the tradition. That the Lawrences were Congregationalists is a relevant point—their Nonconformity was very far from being the debased tin-chapel salvationism that Mr. Eliot appears to think it. Congregationalism had a peculiarly strong intellectual tradition—in what ways does Mr. Eliot think Unitarianism superior? As for the part played by Nonconformity in English civilization, I suggest that he reads Halévy, though books alone will not cure that kind of ignorance.

And for those young people in the 1890s their intellectual education was intimately bound up with a social training which, even if it didn't give them Wykehamist or Etonian or even Harvard manners, I see no reason for supposing inferior to that enjoyed by Mr. Eliot. Moreover, they met and talked and read in a setting of family-life such as, to judge from *The Cocktail Party*, Mr. Eliot cannot imagine to have existed—a family-life beset by poverty and the day-to-day exigencies of breadwinning, yet quite finely civilized. And further, with what advantageous consequences for English literature I have pointed out in some detail, Lawrence knew every day of his life in intimate experience the confrontation, the interpenetration, of the old agricultural England with the industrial; the contrast of the organic forms and rhythms and the old

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beauty of humane adaptation with what had supervened.

As for the intellectual training, *that* Lawrence, I have insisted, did not lack (and Fr. Tiverton says that he has to agree with me here as against Mr. Eliot). Lawrence, we know, was not denied acquaintance with formal academic standards. He says some severe things about Nottingham University College, but he was qualified to make incomparable use of his opportunities, and that he made good use, in formal study, and in informal intercourse, intellectual and social, with his friends, we know. In short, I cannot see on what grounds Mr. Eliot could assume it to be obvious (if he does—and I don't know what else his tone means) that he himself at twenty-one was better trained intellectually than Lawrence at the same age. He was certainly more sophisticated, and his ability, years older, to proclaim himself, ceremonially, Anglo-Catholic, Royalist and Classicist, suggests to me that he was certainly less mature.

I have already made my comment on Mr. Eliot's ignorance of the English cultural history, of the English civilization, that is illuminated in E.T.'s *Memoir of D. H. Lawrence*. It will not be found surprising if I sum up on this head of Lawrence's ignorance by saying that to take him as an example of 'the crippling effect upon men of letters of not having been brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition' seems to me nothing more respectable than an astonishing feat of prejudice—and ignorance.

That Lawrence *was* brought up in a living and central tradition —there, it seems to me, is where to lay the stress. And it seems to me the right answer to the less bluntly repellable form in which Mr. Eliot bring his charge in this recent Foreword: 'for Lawrence was an ignorant man in the sense that he was unaware of how much he did not know'. Mr. Eliot imputes in particular some defects of knowledge about religion and theology, and I cannot forbear concluding this matter of ignorance with a direct retort. I am not, then, impressed by any superiority of religious and theological knowledge in a writer capable of exposing what is to me the shocking essential ignorance that characterizes *The Cocktail Party*—ignorance of the possibilities of life; ignorance of the effect the play must have on a kind of reader or spectator of whose existence the author appears to be unaware: the reader who has, himself, found serious work to do in the world and is able to be unaffectedly serious about it, who knows what family life is and has helped to bring up children and who, though capable of being interested in Mr. Eliot's poetry, cannot afford cocktail civilization and would reject it, with contempt and boredom, if he *could* afford it.

I come out with these things in order to bring home the force of my insistence that Lawrence *was* brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition. Anything in the nature of *The Cocktail Party* from him is inconceivable, and he, in his good-humoured way (the charge of impatience is very ill-founded), with that light and unstrained but complete seriousness of his, would have made the unanswerable diagnostic comment. (There are two

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reviews of *The Cocktail Party* I should like to see—one by Lawrence and one by Albert Schweitzer).

Another damaging suggestion about Lawrence that is propagated by Mr. Eliot is that which is conveyed with the word 'insights': 'He was a man of profound insights, rather than of ratiocinative powers'. In the 1920s they used commonly to grant that Lawrence had *genius*; but intelligence, which really mattered—for that you must go to Aldous Huxley. I myself have always felt bound to insist—though it should, I can't help thinking, be obvious—that genius in Lawrence was, among other things, supreme intelligence. It is on intelligence, and not on 'insight' or 'intuition', that I choose to lay the stress; and Mr. Eliot's formulation explains well enough why. 'He was a man of fitful and profound insights, rather than of ratiocinative powers'—which amounts to the earlier judgment: 'a lack of the critical faculties which education should give, and an incapacity for what is ordinarily called thinking'.

This account seems to me completely mistaken. Lawrence's 'insights' were a matter of being able to see what was there, as only genius can, and they went with an extraordinary power of relating insights, and not only of understanding situations comprising elements difficult to get at and recognize, but of understanding whole comprehensive and complete fields of experience. His thinking, in fact, is so much superior to what is ordinarily called thinking that it tends not to be recognized for thinking at all. If 'ratiocinative powers' means anything worth having, then Lawrence's seem to me superlative; in logical stamina, the power to pursue an organizing process of thought through a wide and difficult tract, with a sustained consistency that is at the same time a delicate fidelity to the complexities of the full concrete experience, Lawrence seems to me to be superior to Mr. Eliot (yes, to the author of *Four Quartets*).

If I wanted to win recognition most readily for the justice of this claim (presuming it not granted) I should turn first to *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*. This is the sober prose exposition corresponding to the *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, the work that Mr. Eliot commends in *After Strange Gods*. In *Psycho-analysis and the Unconscious* Lawrence explains his conception of the nature and the function of intelligence, in doing which he exemplifies intelligence, so conceived, in operation.

What he undertakes to do in the book (and I think that he does it with wonderful lucidity and complete convincingness) is to set forth the conditions of health and wholeness in the psyche. I have recently quoted key passages in discussing *Women in Love* in these pages. The relevant stress at this moment is this: Lawrence makes plain that without a proper use of intelligence there can be no solution of the problems of mental, emotional and spiritual health. We are committed, he insists, to consciousness and self-responsibility. The mind—mental consciousness—has its essential part in the prosperous functioning of the psyche; but it cannot, with its will-enforced ideas or ideals, command the sources of life, though it can thwart them. The power of recognizing justly

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the relation of idea and will to spontaneous life, of using the conscious mind for the attainment of 'spontaneous-creative fulness of being', is intelligence. It is intelligence we see at work in the exposition of Lawrence's theme in *Psycho-analysis and the Unconscious*—the intelligence that was necessary for the undertaking just as it is necessary for the attaining and preserving of wholeness in the psyche.

Lawrence's intelligence, in its superlative fineness and vitality, always seems to me—and in the closely argued prose treatise and in the criticism as much as anywhere else— essentially the intelligence of the creative artist. It is significant that Mr. Eliot, who in effect denies the distinction of intelligence, denies the artist too. At least he once—and has never recanted—made a point of the denial, seizing on a statement (quoted in Huxley's introduction to the *Letters*) of what I take to be the truth as a challenge to a counter-demonstration. There is nothing in this recent Foreword to suggest that he has changed his mind,[1] and, whatever Fr. Tiverton's position in the abstract may be, the book itself might have been written by someone quite incapable of perceiving for himself that Lawrence is a great creative writer. And I very much fear that the books about him that Mr. Eliot says we need are not to be any more books of literary criticism than Fr. Tiverton's is. In particular I view with the gravest distrust the prospect of his being adopted for expository appreciation as almost a Christian by writers whose religious complexion is congenial to Mr. Eliot.

What, on such challenges, one has to say in general about Lawrence's genius is this: it manifests itself in an infallible centrality of judgment—that which makes him an incomparable literary critic. I repeat with, if possible, even greater conviction what I have said before: he has an unfailingly sure sense of the difference between that which makes for life and that which makes against it; of the difference between health and that which tends away from health. It is this that makes him a so much better critic than Eliot, whose major value-judgments, when he risks them (especially in the contemporary field), have nearly always been bad—often disastrously bad. But I ought at this point to add that I speak as one who, when years ago Mr. Eliot wrote in *The Criterion* of the frightful consequences that might have ensued if Lawrence 'had been a don at Cambridge, rotten and rotting others', was widely supposed— at Cambridge, anyway, where it mattered—to share the honour of the intention with Lawrence.

Mr. Aldington's book doesn't, perhaps, bear out the full menace of the title. It isn't, indeed, free from vulgarity. But the trouble with it is that Mr. Aldington has no notion of his relative place in the scheme of things: Lawrence may be a genius, but—Mr. Aldington feels that he has his measure (was he not personally familiar with him?). He sees no reason for chastening a certain natural assurance of tone, and assumption, in approaching and commenting. The worst is that he tends, in some matters, to assimilate Lawrence to

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himself, and to suggest that Lawrence shared the amoristic emancipation of the 1920s. But (though, unfortunately, literary judgments are inevitably conveyed) Mr. Aldington avowedly offers, not literary criticism, but biography. It is a pity that one cannot feel happier about the tone and the touch.

A comprehensive assemblage of the facts has its uses. But E.T.'s *Memoir* will always remain an unsuperseded classic. And when I think of the career that started in the ugly mining village in the spoilt Midlands, amidst all those apparent disadvantages, it seems to me that, even in these days, it should give us faith in the creative human spirit and its power to ensue fulness of life.

F. R. LEAVIS.

[1]As for Lawrence's writing 'often badly', I have allowed that he *sometimes* does. But badness in him is never of the order of the badness in Mr. Eliot's writing (*e.g.*, in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*), where it betrays impurity of motive, unworthy moral and emotional attitudes, thwarting of intelligence by unrecognized emotional bias, and unwillingness or fear in the author to criticize his self-suspect intentions

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POUND IN HIS LETTERS

THE LETTERS OF EZRA POUND. Edited by D. D. Paige. (*Faber*, 25/-).

EZRA POUND: A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS. Edited by Peter Russell (*Peter Nevill*, 12/6).

One would say that the volume of *Letters*, in sum, made tragic reading, if only the disaster it records weren't accompanied by so much that is brutally without dignity, and where it is comic, often odious too. The disaster, in fact, was a long degeneration, and is tragic only in that there had been something so admirable and heroic about the hero. The Pound who came to England in 1908 showed a wonderful energy of disinterested intelligence and public spirit. Never, in the literary world, has there been a more courageous single-mindedness. 'Until someone is honest we get nothing clear'. 'It is only when a few men who know get together and *disagree* that any sort of criticism is born'. 'Isn't it worth while having *one* critic who won't say a thing is *good* until he is ready to stake his whole position on the decision?' 'You offer to find a publisher . . . if I abrogate my privileges, if I give way to, or saddle myself with, a damn'd contentious, probably incompetent committee. If I tacitly, tacitly to say the least of it, accept a certain number of people as my critical and creative equals, and publish the acceptance'. 'Dear H[arriet] M[onroe]: No, most emphatically I will not ask Eliot to write down to any audience whatsoever. I dare say my instinct was sound enough when I volunteered to quit the magazine quietly about a year ago. Neither will I send you Eliot's address in order that he may be insulted'.

He forced Eliot on Harriet Monroe's Chicago *Poetry*, and, with a patent absence of concern for anything but the reputation, livelihood and development of poets and writers, did what he could to get them published and known, and to make such organs as he could start, commandeer or get a hand in, serve his magnanimous purposes. To discover and launch Eliot—that is a historic achievement. He may claim also a large part of the credit for Joyce. Whom else did he push?—Wyndham Lewis, in recording which item we come, it seems to me, to the other side of the account, and to Pound's limitations. For these, which are very serious in a man who has been so influential, have—and especially in view of the second volume given above—to be insisted on, and at length.

Wyndham Lewis's reputation as a writer was established by the efforts of the Egoist group, in which Pound played so large a part. As a result, that reputation—which cannot, I believe, bear the beginnings of critical scrutiny—enjoyed the support of Eliot's rising prestige in the 1920s. Eliot remained faithful till at least the middle 'thirties (and to-day we are in danger of having *Tarr* and *The Childermass* revived and pressed on us as memorable works). I stress the instance of Wyndham Lewis, because he is representative; he

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represents a kind of toughness—a truculent inhumanity or anti-humanity ('My God, they stink!'), a mechanistic externality—an attraction to which is to be found in Eliot as well as Pound. (It is to be noted, too, that while Pound backed Mussolini, and Wyndham Lewis wrote a book in favour of Hitler, Eliot drew inspiration for such distinctive ethos as *The Criterion* had from Charles Maurras.)

If we ask what other poets Pound backed (other than Robert Frost), the answer is that it is hard to remember, because on the whole they matter so little. And here again we have Pound's limitations.

And yet it was, beyond question, a strong intelligence that influenced Eliot—and Yeats—beneficently at a crucial moment, and earned Pound an illustrious place in the history of English poetry. He encouraged Yeats in his emergence out of the incantations of the Celtic Twilight into speech-rhythms and a use of language spare, taut, and ironical. He knew what, in a post-Swinburnian climate, had to be said to the young talent if there was to be any hope of a prosperous development. 'Verse ought to be at least as well written as prose'—this was a dictum that Pound could enforce in cogent (and constructive) particular criticism.

'I think', says Mr. Eliot in the essay of his reprinted in Mr. Russell's volume, 'that Pound was original in insisting that poetry was an art, an art which demands the most arduous application and study, and in seeing that in our time it has to be a highly conscious art'. In order to indicate the nature of a promising addiction to 'art', more, of course, is needed than a reference to the Provençal patterns that Pound cultivated. What more, Mr. Eliot provides a couple of sentences further on:

> 'The business of the poet is to be more conscious of his own language than other men, to be more sensitive to the feeling, more aware of the meaning of every word he uses, more aware of the history of the language and of every word he uses, than other men'.

The more one ponders it the more difficult a concept does 'language' become to delimit. To be sensitive to a language is to be sensitive to a culture. You can only hope to be sensitive to a language of the past, or to a foreign language, out of your sensitiveness to your own contemporary culture—out of your sensitiveness to your own language, your sensitiveness and consciousness in the present.

And here we come again to Pound's limitations. How can he have offered with such conviction his Guides, his *How to Reads*, his quintessential propædeutics for poets, with their prescriptions of Provençal, mediæval Italian, Chinese, and so on? How could he discriminate so perversely and confidently in favour of so dull a set of conventions as the Provençal—conventions with so inferior a culture behind them and in them? when the Middle Ages have so much to offer that is so much more worth study, and in the past of his own language? 'Really one DON'T need to know a language.

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One NEEDS, damn well needs, to know the few hundred words in the few really good poems that any language has in it'. He didn't really know what a culture was at all—in spite of his noble desire 'to set the arts in their rightful place as the acknowledged guide and lamp of civilization'. Though he boasted that, 'neither Irish nor Catholic, I have had more mediæval contact than most, through Dante and my Provençal', he knew about mediæval civilization essentially nothing. And he knew about Europe, one is driven to say too, essentially nothing.

For the admirable American energy and disinterestedness and generosity that were his virtues carried with them certain attendant disabilities. He glimpsed in poetry and art light and significance that should, he felt, make life worth living; and he devoted himself with magnificent single-mindedness to the service of what he saw. But of the nature of that and its relation to life, he had only the most limited understanding—barbarian, one is inclined to say, but the barbarians had cultures in precisely the sense that Pound remained unaware of. He could judge that he had been born 'in a half-savage country', but the unawareness persisted invincibly. 'It takes about 600 to make a civilization', he says in 1928. Anyone who doubts the significance of this should ponder the following:

> 'The Greek populace was PAID to attend the great Greek tragedies, and darn well wouldn't have gone otherwise, or if there had been a cinema.
>
> Shakespeare was "Lord Somebody's players"; and the Elizabethan drama, as distinct from the long defunct religious plays, was a court affair'.

As for the degeneration, that becomes apparent when Pound takes to Social Credit (and Mussolini). 'He saw', says the editor in his Foreword, 'Europe drifting towards a war that could have been avoided by a simple currency reform'. About the bullying wilfulness of conviction with which Pound, in and out of season, asserted that things *were* as simple as that there was not only an element of Jonsonian comedy; there was also something repellently brutal, a certain native tough and truculent insensitiveness turning into a positive vice. And here we come to the famous 'brilliant epistolary style'.

The letters do indeed exhibit a racy vigour and a strong directness and bite, conveying the courage and grapple of a live disinterested mind. But from early on there are characteristics that, long before the end of the volume, have become a boring exasperation. There is that facetious and utterly pointless misspelling which Pound indulges in as soon as—which is very readily (even—a piquant situation—in writing to my old headmaster)—he feels that he has established an epistolary familiarity with a correspondent. So far from growing out of it he grows into it, and at the best it is the sign of a portentous established immaturity.

But it is worse than that; it goes with something that is also immaturity *and* worse: 'The French', he says, 'have a word of

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five letters and the English of four'. In the one letter I have from Pound (and which I did not hand over to the editor—but because of its manner of referring to a distinguished poet and critic, and early friend of Pound) the 'brilliant epistolary style' is mainly a matter of the repetition of the English word. That word, in the Letters, has for abundant company a great deal of the same order, and, in spite of some variety of a kind (*e.g.* 'bug-headed ape') the total effect is that of the maddening and depressing monotony of Army obscenity.

It is more than a superficial foible; as we see it growing on the letter-writer we see a certain native (or cultural) insensitiveness, indulged and sanctioned, developing into a repellently ugly and inhuman brutality. Pound, translating the Shelleyan exaltations about the creative mind, writes: 'Humanity is malleable mud, and the arts set the mould it is later cast into'. It is significant that, in the same letter, two sentences further on, he writes: 'Victoria was an excrement, Curtis, Lorrimer, *all* British journalism are excrement', etc. The significance—the relation of these habits of expression to the bullying and overbearing absoluteness with which Pound advanced his simple panacea—is to be seen in the scatalogical Cantos. 'Inhuman brutality' too strong a description for what the toughness, the coarseness, the lack of something, comes to be?—Consider the attitude that Pound found himself able to take towards the systematic, and unspeakably atrocious, doing to death of the Jews of Europe. The spectacle of Pound's degeneration is a terrible one, and no one ought to pretend that is anything but what it is.

And this painfully limited mind, which does not know what a civilization is, and can suppose that to appreciate the best poems in a language you need only know as much of the language as the poems contain, is credited (see the essays in Mr. Peter Russell's collection) with having created a modern epic: 'No one ever knew his own mind more clearly', says Mr. Hugh Kenner. 'Indeed the didactic gestures emerge naturally from the store-house of volitional forms. . . .' The poet of the Cantos 'knows his own mind' clearly in the sense that what his technique is devoted to conveying is nothing substantially more than what, at the platform level, the didactic, conscious will dictates. And that confident domineering didactic consciousness is not the servant of any vital underlying theme, or of any rich sense of positive life. Mr. Eliot said the damning thing about Pound's moral inspiration when he remarked that Pound's hells 'are for the other people'. What comes up from below is hatred and the will to reduce life to what can give excuse for hatred and contempt and disgust. (Pound, like Eliot, dislikes Lawrence and is drawn to Wyndham Lewis—who also dislikes Lawrence). Whatever the intensity of 'art' represented by the Cantos, the effect, for all the famous skill and variety of versification, is barrenness and monotony. *Mauberley* stands alone—a great poem; the art there is creative, the expression of a young, strong, generous and still sensitive mind.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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THE VERSE OF CHRISTOPHER FRY

VENUS OBSERVED by Christopher Fry (Oxford University Press, 7/6).

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING by Christopher Fry (Oxford University Press, 6/-).

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS by Christopher Fry (Oxford University Press, 6/-).

It is becoming usual to compare Christopher Fry's verse with Marlowe's. 'There is the same verbal impatience', writes a recent critic who has insisted on the point, 'the [same] laddering of effects towards an over-all tonal roof, and the exuberance and extravagance of the autonomous language . . .'. The comparison is useful as a means of showing up the way Fry's verse fails—and it does fail in a way somewhat unusual for a contemporary poet. In analysing that failure, Marlovian is a decidedly helpful word, but in order to keep its signification clearly in mind it would be well to glance at some of Marlowe's verse. I have selected, as conforming to the description of it just given, one of the showier passages from *The Tragedy of Dido*, for if Fry is to be compared with Marlowe the more austere and greater poetry of *Faustus* can hardly be in question, even with Fry enthusiasts:

> I'll give thee tackling made of rivelled gold,
> Wound on the barks of odoriferous trees,
> Oars of massy ivory full of holes,
> Through which the water shall delight to play:
> Thy anchors shall be hewed from crystal rocks,
> Which if thou lose shall shine above the waves:
> The masts whereon thy swelling sails shall hang,
> Hollow pyramids of silver plate:
> The sails of folded lawn, where shall be wrought
> The wars of Troy, but not Troy's overthrow:
> For ballast, empty Dido's treasury . . .

The hard clarity of these images indicates that they issue immediately from a sensibility quickened by the sensuous splendours of the Renaissance world. Their 'tonal roof' exists in an imagination finely controlled by the possibilities of late sixteenth century magnificence, and not (as we shall see in Fry's case) among the fading echoes of literary predecessors. In Fry's verse one feels that the vitality is largely a matter of artificial stimulation, a slick and modernized copy—thoroughly backward-looking for all its face of newness—of the vitality of other years. But the language Marlowe uses is vital in its own right, alive with promise; and what that promise shortly came to, we know:

> The barge she sat in like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;

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Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them: the oars were silver;
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water, which they beat, to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes.

The same critic who calls Fry Marlovian quotes the following passage from *Venus Observed* as representing Fry's verse at its best. 'In the face of such verse', he says, 'it is almost ungrateful to criticize, or pointless, for a poet like this should be bound to make his own way regardless of what we say or where we should like him to go':

Shall I be happy for myself?
In the name of existence I'll be happy for myself.
Why, Reedbeck, how marvellous it is to moulder.
Think how you would have felt when you were lying
Grubbing in your mother's womb,
With only a wall to look at,
If you could have seen in your embryonic eye
The realm of bryony, sloes, rose-hips,
And a hedge's ruin, a golden desuetude,
A countryside like a drowned angel
Lying in shallow water, every thorn
Tendering a tear. Think, Reedbeck,
Think of the wonder of such glimmering woe;
How in a field of milk-white haze the lost
Apollo glows and wanders towards noon;
The wind-blown webs are brighter,
The rolling apples warmer than the sun.
Heavens! you would have cried, the womb
Echoing round you: These are the heavens, and I,
Reedbeck, am stillborn. Would you not?

Nothing could be further from Marlowe. The colours of *this* speech flake and fade, and the outline of its images grows misty. There is very little of concrete immediacy behind it, and even 'bryony, sloes, rose-hips' suggest second-hand literary gleanings rather than a genuine response to the real things, or even to the experience of the words. And the triumph represented by 'A countryside like a drowned angel/Lying in shallow water' is, I think, obviously so easy that its presence in the passage ought surely to have qualified the recommendation. What experience can one possibly carry away from a line like that? It esteems angels at a very cheap rate, and in fact the only image the line conveys to me at all is a recollection of Onslow-Ford's nude statue of the drowned Shelley which so charmingly defaces University College, Oxford. It is an image Edna St. Vincent Millay might have been happy to have used, but hardly an Elizabethan. It is completely devoid of the diamond clarity of Marlowe's lines, and if one imagines

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it bears some similarity to the style of *Hero and Leander*, a comparison of its sweetened imperspicuity with the astringent rococo of Marlowe's visual images in that poem will show up the differences at once. There is little or nothing behind an image like that. Once the dressing is removed, the frame underneath is seen to be hollow, and Fry's verse is filled with such images. Turning to the remainder of the passage, one willingly concedes a certain prettiness, but it is of a kind not very difficult to duplicate:

> I am too burdened by long laughing days,
> And as I wandered through this solemn vapour
> Of the worn earth, the comfort-smelling earth,
> Where unexpected trees rose wearily
> And sank again like ashen-bosomed sighs,
> I felt a new delighting mournfulness
> That made me know where I am sensitive
> To the deep things of life: even the late May-bloom
> That stays the tiring spring in this strange valley,
> Loses its too self-conscious hope tonight—
> The pink would fain be white, and the spent white
> Still fog and sink to the moon, and make an end.
> I must be much alone in sorrowful nights.
> I should have ease if summer would but go,
> Its green-lit glory fail . . .

This is a typical passage from Gordon Bottomley's verse-play, *Midsummer Eve*, first printed in 1905. Any analysis of these two passages would be extremely interesting which could show just where and how Fry's poetry essentially transcends Bottomley's. There are differences of course: Fry's verse is a little peppier (I think that is the right word). But I cannot see that Fry has any margin of advantage whatever over Bottomley. In terms of poetry, what is the difference between a 'green-lit glory' and a 'golden desuetude'? These passages indicate that both poets have fallen to work in the same spirit, and have produced pretty much the same sort of thing.

The Fry passage quoted above does more than justice to the general level of poetry in his plays. In fact, I doubt if Fry has transcended this passage anywhere else in his writings. More typical of his usual manner is this bumptious, fulminating speech of Thomas Mendip's from *The Lady's Not for Burning*.

> THOMAS. Consider: vastiness lusted, mother;
> A huge heaving desire, overwhelming solitude,
> And the mountain belly of Time laboured
> And brought forth man, the mouse. The spheres
> churned on,
> With sufficient organ music, sadly sent out
> On the wrong wave of sound; but still they roll
> Fabulous and fine, a roundabout

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Of doomed and golden notes. And on beyond
Profound with thunder of oceanic power
Lie the morose dynamics of our dumb friend
Jehovah.
Why should these omnipotent bombinations
Go on with deadly anecdote, which
From the first was never more than remotely funny?
No; the time has come for tombs to tip
Their refuse; for the involving ivy, the briar,
The convolutions of convulvulus,
To disentangle and make way
For the last great ascendancy of dust,
Sucked into judgment by a cosmic yawn
Of boredom. The Last Trump
Is timed for twenty-four hours precisely.

This provides a good example of Fry's ironic overstatement. This ironic overstatement has been much praised by some critics as constituting a complex interplay between the gorgeousness of his poetry and his consciousness of the difficulties which that mode must encounter in the mundane prosing world. But so far from the juxtaposition representing a very complex attitude, it appears, to me at least, as a sophisticated defence mechanism for not having anything to say—as a highly trained but inexpensive substitute for a personal and convincing attitude. So far from the ironic overstatement in the above passage expressing a very complicated or interesting response to life or experience it seems to be chiefly a cover-up for vacuity. A phrase like 'convolutions of convulvulus' is not playful so much as it is bathetic and poetically irresponsible, while the tone of the whole is what one might expect of *Paradise Lost* if it were rewritten by Ogden Nash. In his verse play, *The End of the World,* first produced in 1914, Lascelles Abercrombie wrote a number of passages which might be compared with the one above, and to do so would reveal the advantages to be with Bottomley whose verse would prove to be, I think, at least as metaphorically vigorous as Fry's. But in mentioning the Georgians again I have not wished to suggest a direct influence. It is of the essence of the case that poetry like this can show mutual similarities without the question of direct influence arising. Such poetry is, at bottom, a conventional concoction capable of being mixed and served up independently by more than one competent versifier. I have wished mainly to point to other writers than Marlowe whom Fry more nearly and significantly resembles.

Before discussing, finally, what I believe is the real reason for Fry's popularity to-day I should like to sum up what has been said here about the serious aspects of his verse. The surface of his poetry is exasperatingly unyielding to any inner movement. The ingredients of almost any passage from his later plays boil down to the same things: a cynicism too youthful and exhibitionistic to be disturbingly bitter; the ability to flatter the rather soggy contemporary audience,

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whose real taste is for whimsicality, with the suggestion that in his poetry they have graduated into an appreciation of something really sophisticated or highbrow; an extreme narrowness of emotional range which monotonously repeats its tones and tricks with the good effect that everyone can settle back in the comfortable knowledge of what will be expected from them in the way of response. This last achievement is based partly on Fry's method of writing some of his more striking verse passages—his habit of achieving an easy smartness at the expense of traditional English poetry. Take this passage from *Venus Observed* which describes the effect of a solar eclipse:

> Daylight, you see, is shamming twilight. Nature
> Is being made a fool of. Three or four stars, there,
> You can see them wince, where only a moment earlier
> Morning was all serene. The crows, with much
> Misgiving, talk themselves into their trees. Even
> The usually phlegmatic owls
> Care a hoot or two. The bats from the barn
> Make one flickering flight, and return to hang
> Their heads. All of them tricked and fuddled
> By the passing of a small cadaverous planet.

There is a broad implicit reference (broad enough, indeed, to make its appeal to everybody who has read any poetry at all) to a number of great passages from Shakespeare to William Collins and Gray. The traditional images are all there, but reduced to an intolerable cuteness. The crows that once made wing to the rooky wood do a repeat performance, but have acquired a drawing room manner in the meantime, and the moping owl that once to the moon complained against those who 'molest her ancient solitary reign' still speaks in a recognizable voice but with an utterly changed accent. This sort of writing, which is much more easy than most people seem to think, implies that nothing is really serious enough to allow any interruption to the graceful tinkle going on for ever and ever in Mr. Fry's pages. Even nature is being made a fool of, so why bother? Most poets (especially the Elizabethans) did bother, but it's *so* easy to keep up the flow of one's own poetry by a charming, gentle raillery playing over the rich traditional deposits of metaphor from the past. One mustn't, of course, eschew the solemn subjects—that might imply a kind of defeat—but one must rise superior to them in one's verse by allowing one's own saucy little images to snap their fingers gaily under the nose of seriousness.[1] Because what they say never means anything to Fry's characters, it never means anything to the people who listen to their speeches either, which is perhaps as good an explanation of a popular success as any other.

But I suspect that the real reason for Fry's popularity lies in the quality of his much vaunted wit. Behind its gaudy disguise of imitation Elizabethan one frequently catches more than a glimpse of the sort of thing Terence Rattigan offers. In fact Fry's short

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play, *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, is like nothing as much as a sophisticated skit from a high-class music revue. All it needs is a bit of cutting and tightening up, and the ideal cast for it would be Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne as Tegeus-Chromis and Dynamene, and as Doto, Beatrice Lillie. The play is filled with dialogue like the following:

> I am lonely,
> Virilius. Where is the punctual eye
> And where is the cautious voice which made
> Balance sheets sound like Homer and Homer sound
> Like balance sheets?

Or,

> TEGEUS. . . . .
> . . . I swear by Horkos and the Styx,
> I swear by the nine acres of Tityos,
> I swear by the Hypnotic oath, by all the Titans—
> By Koeos, Krios, Iapetos, Kronos, and so on—
> By the three Hekatoncheires, by the insomnia
> Of Tisiphone, by Jove, by jove, and the dew
> On the feet of my boyhood, I am innocent
> Of mocking you. Am I Salmoneus
> That, seeing such a flame of sorrow—

---

[1]Sometimes the relation of a passage of Fry's verse to a traditional passage is one of more or less direct imitation without the intrusion of his professional tongue-in-the-cheek attitude. Jennet's speech in the first act of *The Lady's Not for Burning* is an example:

> JENNET. They tell one tale, that once, when the moon
> Was gibbous and in a high dazed state
> Of nimbus love, I shook a jonquil's dew
> On to a pearl and let a cricket chirp
> Three times, thinking of pale Peter:
> And there Titania was, vexed by a cloud
> Of pollen, using the sting of a bee to clean
> Her nails and singing, as drearily as a gnat,
> 'Why try to keep clean?'

This is a very pretty little speech in itself, but it means much more to us because it starts echoes in our memory of Michael Drayton's *Nimphidia* and Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, and possibly a dozen other passages. Yet Fry's poetry here makes no original use of this resemblance (unless of course one thinks the anti-climax of the last line constitutes something new—which I don't). It is content merely to mine the vein. This 'mining' even goes on where the characters are concerned. For example, Thomas Mendip, the melancholy man of *The Lady*, is only Jacques lifted out of the Forest of Arden, and quite unsatisfactorily worked over. If this is what critics mean when they call Fry 'Elizabethan' it is a very unhappy use of the word.

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DYNAMENE. You needn't
Labour to prove your secondary education.
Perhaps I jumped to a wrong conclusion, perhaps
I was hasty.

DOTO. How easy to swear if you're properly educated.
Wasn't it pretty, madam? Pardon.

To sum up the characteristics of these plays, they are written in verse thoroughly lacking in style, whether one interprets 'style' in a tightly critical or in a loosely fashionable way. Under the surface smartness the verse is thoroughly conventional and academic. It has, it is true, an appearance of originality, but this is partly because this kind of verse fell into such absolute neglect after the First War that most theatre-goers have forgotten that verse dramas with high-pressure poetry were once highly esteemed, if not widely produced, in this Century.

Both *Venus Observed* and *The Lady's Not for Burning* are pretenders to a distinction which neither possess, but the wholly unfavourable opinion they would persuade one to take of Fry must be somewhat qualified when one considers his most recent play, *A Sleep of Prisoners*. Almost as much as the two plays already considered, it seems to lack dramatic structure, but it is probable that it would gain a good deal of clarity and form in enactment. The fact that it has been written for church rather than for theatre performances is important, for the action, which seems so tenuous on the printed page, is fitted with functional adroitness into the ecclesiastical setting; and this would almost certainly sharpen the outline and add point and an emphasis which is lacking for the reader of the text. And the setting must also be remembered when the dialogue sometimes sounds too liturgical to be adequately dramatic. The quality of the verse in this play represents a palpable improvement over that of the earlier plays. There are, certainly, criticisms that can be made. It is fashionably spiritual in the way of so much contemporary verse drama and poetry to-day. It has half an eye cocked at *Little Gidding*, and it is no doubt natural that the spirituality should seem a little forced. There has been for some time a real danger that those profound poised insights into reality, suffering, and redemption, which grace the pages of the great mystical writers should become the stock clichés of twentieth century poets in the same way that, say, eighteenth century poets drew on classical mythology. Nevertheless, the verse of *A Sleep of Prisoners* is tighter and more rhythmically sensitive than any Fry has so far written. It is relatively austere—for Fry at least, and is free of that tedious whimsy which discoloured the 'spirituality' of Fry's early play, *The Boy with a Cart*. If what it says often sounds familiar, there is also a suggestion of personal feelings that is entirely lacking in *Venus Observed* and *The Lady*. It is not so much, at its best, verse for a swashbuckler to orate as it is verse to be intelligently spoken. And that is something new for Fry. It may even be as good as anything we can expect in modern poetic drama. But in saying this I am aware that the praise is perhaps rather slight.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

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